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The Nation

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LETTERS.

COLD WAR

Washington

E.P. Thompson's reckless attack on my article in the Fall 1984 issue of *Foreign Policy* is so incredibly misguided and strewn with errors that it cannot pass without reply ["It's Time for the Twain to Meet," Sept. 14].

Thompson characterized my article as wondering "whether or how far independent peace initiatives in the East might be exploited to the advantage of Uncle Sam." A grosser distortion of my argument is hard to imagine. I wrote of Eastern Europe's independent peace activists with sympathy and criticized politicians who cynically profess concern for them in order to attack the Western peace movements. I bemoaned the widespread ignorance of Eastern Europe among our leaders, particularly that shown in a speech by Vice President George Bush, which embarrassed the Hungarians in order to denounce the Russians. Thompson even quoted my statement that "the United States should keep quiet and allow the East and West European peace movements to support each other as natural allies in their struggle against the military policies of both superpowers." This is exploitation?

Thompson also takes issue with my observation that a flourishing of independent peace movements in Eastern Europe threatens Soviet control. He writes that such movements "threaten not the Russians but the whole rationale of the cold war." Space does not permit me to rebut in detail. Suffice it to say that few persons knowledgeable about Eastern Europe would disagree that the development of any broad-based popular movement not dominated by the Communist Party poses a threat to Soviet control. Indeed, if Thompson were to listen closely to his friends in the East, he might understand that this is what they are saying too. In any case, I simply wrote about the political realities of Eastern Europe. For Thompson to portray me as somehow proposing that the United States "exploit" any indigenous challenge to Soviet control is ludicrous. I have not and do not advocate such a policy.

Why does Thompson misrepresent my article so blatantly? Because it serves as his lone example that "the opaque think tanks of Washington are bubbling with powerful thoughts" of exploiting the peace movements of Eastern Europe. The problem is that they are not. For better or worse, official Washington is indifferent to these movements, which is why I chose to write about them in the first place. I know of no other major article, seminar, conference or any other sign that the think tanks have even heard of these peace movements. Thompson misrepresents my argument to make a case that is patently false.

Harder to understand is Thompson's questioning of my integrity. Though I worked as a policy analyst for the Department of Defense, when I publish an article under my own name I speak for myself alone. It should have been obvious from my criticisms of U.S. policy that this is so. Nevertheless, I am called "a man so close to the sweaty armpits of power that he must enter the caveat that 'the views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. government.'" I assure Thompson that I am quite far from the "sweaty armpits of power." The implication that this caveat meant anything other than what it said, that I am speaking for anybody other than myself, is the vilest slander indeed.

Has Thompson distorted my argument in order to attack a U.S. policy that does not exist or did he simply not take the time to read my article carefully? I have respected Thompson since reading *The Making of the English Working Class* as a student, and I noted favorably in my article his contribution to the East-West dialogue. That he now attacks me so wrongly and carelessly is as sad as it is disgraceful. *Robert English*

THOMPSON REPLIES

Worcester, England

Robert English overreacts. Perhaps Europeans have a simplified view of things and do not understand the operation of U.S. bureaucracies. But from our point of view, a policy analyst working for the Department of Defense under Caspar Weinberger and such officers as Fred Iklé and Richard Perle is close to the sweaty armpits of power.

In his article English not only advised the United States to "keep quiet" and let West European and independent East European peace movements support each other. He also explained that he gave this advice because "the greater threat is to the Soviets." That is, he sees two sides locked in combat and can only see the outcome in terms of the advantage of one side. We consider that there is a third way between both sides and that the threat is to the whole cold war system. Yes, the threat is to Soviet control; it is to United States control also.

There have of course been repeated U.S., British and NATO attempts to exploit dissident movements to their advantage in the cold war game and to the disadvantage of the dissidents. I am glad to learn that English does not advocate this policy. If he reads the complete essay "Double Exposure" in my new book, *The Heavy Dancers*, from which the *Nation* article is taken, he may understand my argument better (and learn a thing or two). But if I have mistaken his intentions I apologize. And if he truly is a dove, now that President Reagan is going full blast exploiting human rights in order to distract attention from his unwillingness to engage in serious disarmament or détente, I recommend very earnestly that for the sake of his integrity English take another job.

E.P. Thompson

WELL SAID

New York City

I feel compelled to write in praise of Edward W. Said's eye-opening essay on Joan Peters's *From Time Immemorial* ["Conspiracy of Praise," Oct. 19]. I find it rare these days that one piece of prose can change my thinking about a subject. But Said has accomplished this act of enlightenment. For this I am grateful. I'm sure I don't agree on all things with Said, but his essay clears the air enough so that we might see some common ground. I salute his clarity, logic and scholarship. *Jack Newfield*

RADICAL ABSENCE OF HISTORY

New York City

In his essay on Joan Peters's book, Edward W. Said writes, "The young progressives who publish *Radical History* conscientiously avoid discussion of the Palestinians." Unfortunately we have never received a single submission discussing the Palestinians during our ten-year publishing history. We should have tried to generate such articles. So, let us begin: both the young and the not-so-young on the *Review* would welcome a submission from Said or anyone else on the subject. Manuscripts should be sent to *Radical History Review*, History Department, John Jay College, 445 West 59th Street, New York, NY 10019.

Daniel J. Walkowitz

THE LAYMAN SPEAKS

New York City

If there is anything less accessible to the layman than high art, it is art criticism. I have just read, back to back, Arthur C. Danto's comments on the "Tilted Arc" and "Twain" controversy and on the exhibit India! ["Art," Sept. 28 and Oct. 26, respectively]. Both articles were accessible to the layman and they clarified what the real issues are. Not only might I start reading art criticism again, I might even go and look at what it is talking about. *Lloyd McAulay*

IN BAD STYLE

Buffalo

E.B. White deserved more than to have your remembrance of him serve as an occasion to attack Ed Koch ["The Years With White," Oct. 12]. No one needs a pretext to criticize the Mayor. White was too important to have been given anything less than your full attention. *Jean Doerr*

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EDITORIALS.

Monkey Business

After rebuffing a number of high-minded arguments against his publishing a story in *Penthouse*, Philip Roth (who until then, in 1976, had refused to publish in any but the highest of high-minded places) fired off a parting witticism to the effect that his friends greatly overestimated the penalties attached to shame. Surely he was right, although he might have noticed, in that post-Watergate era, that he was right only about people in high places; those of no standing have, paradoxically, far to fall.

Such are the inequalities of place in America that Alex Haley and John Gardner can plagiarize, be caught, perhaps pay damages but suffer no loss of esteem. But Timothy Cooney, a philosopher of zero reputation who forged a letter from Robert Nozick endorsing his manuscript for publication, is known principally for this deed no matter the obvious virtues of his book, *Telling Right From Wrong*. Life and literature go on for Jerzy Kosinski despite revelations about unacknowledged ghostdoctors for his books,

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while Janet Cooke, a fledgling journalist who invented a gruesome article about an 8-year-old heroin addict, has dropped from sight.

Which brings us to the more recent matter of Joan Peters and her book *From Time Immemorial*. By now even those individuals whose endorsements appear on the book's jacket must suspect that all is not well with Peters's scholarship, yet no amount of scandal seems to affect the book's sales or its author's stature as a newly minted expert on the Middle East. In Peters's case it is a matter of reputation by association. She will keep hers afloat as long as the sacred persons quoted on the jacket, Theodore White, Saul Bellow, Barbara Tuchman, do not disown her. And those people are too well placed to suffer for having propped up a book made of funny footnotes and crackpot statistics.

But what of Nadav Safran, director of Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies? Safran entered into a secret contract with the C.I.A. for a book on Saudi Arabia which was published last month by Harvard University Press. The terms of the contract gave the agency its customary *droits du seigneur*, the right to approve the text and, of course, the right to forbid its publication. Surely Safran can auction off his academic freedom for $107,430 plus expenses, if he chooses, but what about the integrity of his publisher and the rights of readers to know what they have before them? At the moment Safran's reputation hangs in the balance—with the prestige of Harvard and the strong suggestion that he is not alone in doing this on his side, and the fond presumption of openness and academic integrity on the other. Now if this were 1966 and Safran had been found working on a secret government grant for the development of chemical-biological warfare . . . but that was another country.

* * *

In his essay on James Schuyler's poetry in this fall books issue, Douglas Crase expresses admiration for poems that persuade us that "it is just plain practical to learn to love reality." Despite a certain recklessness with truth in the book business right now, we continue to believe that books and discussions of books can restore us to reality. This issue of *The Nation* is devoted to such discussion.

Secret Sharers

It is said that the Russian anarchist Bakunin and the czarist agent sent to watch him in exile in Zurich grew so dependent on each other that they became like blood brothers, like husband and wife. They saw each other every day in cafes and theaters or strolling by the lake, and although they never spoke, the bond of mutual surveillance gave meaning and validity to both their lives. When Bakunin died, the spy was inconsolable and in a short time followed him to the grave.

That was then, and this is now, but the strange relationship of spies and fugitives, agents and actors, assets and accountants, remains a central feature of the intelligence community. It really is a community, a transnational corporation with an appropriately byzantine nexus of emotional office politics. Certainly the hilarious case of Vitaly Yurchenko seems more like a soap opera than a genuine political event. Of course it has implications for summitry, and it may be that some head will, literally, roll. But the bizarre episode is about espionage as theater, not about intelligence as foreign policy. Both the Soviet and American secret services get themselves into these fixes precisely because they are obsessed with the process and ignorant about the product. "They all do it," as people say, because it validates their institutional existence and gives meaning to their lives. Like Bakunin and his agent, the K.G.B. needs the C.I.A. to stay alive (and vice versa), but what their spies do in their play has mercifully little value for anyone else.

The only problem is that espionage dramas are supposed to have a secret audience drawn entirely from the spy community. Now that the theater has gone public, major propaganda extravaganzas can be expected. The Russians can play that game as well as the West; better, perhaps, because they are masters of the straight face and the rehearsed line. Yurchenko looks like a great actor no matter what his scene, and we can't wait to see his soon-to-be-released major videotape, *My Dinner With William Casey*.

* * *

What Did Norman Birnbaum Know And When Did He Know It?

"In July, Washington announced that K.G.B. officer Vitaly Yurchenko had defected to the West in Rome (meeting the C.I.A. in a Vatican chapel, showing that he, too, reads spy novels). He was described as one of the top five officials in the K.G.B., but does anyone really know? Many agents who defect understandably insist on their indispensability. Suppose he is part of a clever plot, designed to confuse C.I.A. operations." [Birnbaum, "Through the Looking-Glass War," *The Nation*, October 19, 1985]

Statuegate

Last week in *The Nation* Roberta Brandes Gratz and Eric Fettmann charged that the campaign to restore the Statue of Liberty has been used to advance the financial interests of its alleged corporate benefactors and the political interests of its chair, Lee Iacocca ("The Selling of Miss Liberty," November 9). Since Iacocca would not give our authors an interview, we are left with a speech he delivered at West Point, New York, on October 18, the day the first Liberty Coin was struck. "We have made it a point not to commercialize the restoration," Iacocca intoned. Moments before he had told the crowd that "I've been a salesman all my life, but I've never had an easier sale, because nobody ever questions the value of the product."

Iacocca explained that "the easy way [to raise money] would have been to ask Congress. . . . But the easy way also would have been the wrong way because it would have denied all Americans the opportunity to personally participate in this project. And they deserve that opportunity.

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The Statue belongs to the people." We agree, although as Gratz and Fettmann document, corporate sponsorship has prevented the people from participating. We also agree with Iacocca that "the process is as important as the result." Indeed the process is inseparable from the result, as we expect to demonstrate in these pages in the weeks ahead.

In the meantime, a Liberty foundation spokesman told CNN that early management problems (read conflicts of interest) had now been solved. And *The New York Times*, in a story that neglected many of the issues that Gratz and Fettmann had previously raised, published without comment Iacocca's bland assurances that all was well. But when he was asked to debate Gratz on the *Today Show* or to comment on the *Nation* piece by other news organizations, Iacocca declined. Where's Lee? And where's Congress? Where's the Interior Department, reassuming its purloined power in the people's name? We'll let you know.

Duarte Negotiations

Mexico City

The U.S. press reported the September 10 kidnapping and October 23 release of Inés Guadalupe Duarte Durán and her friend Ana Cecilia Villeda as a human interest story. The anguish of Salvadoran President José Napoleón Duarte was prominently featured; the act was analyzed as a sign of the growing desperation of the rebels of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. There is another side to the story, though, and I heard it here from a high-level representative of the F.M.L.N. who was involved in the negotiations for Inés Duarte's release and who must remain unidentified for security reasons. The kidnapping, he told me, was "a military operation within a war."

A week before it took place, according to my source, the guerrillas proposed to President Duarte an exchange of twenty-three Christian Democratic mayors they had captured for thirty-four rebel political prisoners in government hands. Those mayors, he explained, "are the political and military head of the paramilitary force, a counterinsurgent military power behind a civilian facade." As for the captured guerrillas—the government calls them *desaparecidos*, "disappeared,"—there are about 3,500 of them. My source told me the F.M.L.N. managed to track the thirty-four whose release it demanded. Among them were Nidia Díaz and Mauro Araujo, also called Commander Hugo, both members of the F.M.L.N.'s political commission. Hugo, who was captured in San Salvador in early August, is second in command of the Communist Party's armed wing, a faction of the F.M.L.N.

But Duarte turned down the exchange and cut off communication with the guerrillas. At that point, the guerrillas "had to take measures to get [their] comrades back," the F.M.L.N. representative explained." We had to kidnap a significant government official. Inés Duarte is director of the Christian Democratic Party's Radio Libertad and an important figure in the party." The U.S. press fixed on Inés Duarte's status as the President's favorite child and ignored her political identity.

In negotiations via radio just after the kidnapping, the guerrillas, who identified themselves only as the Pedro Pablo Castillo Front, offered to include Duarte's daughter and her friend in the prisoner exchange proposed a week earlier. The President balked. Claiming that twelve of the thirty-four prisoners were not available for release, he asked for more time to consult with the Legislative Assembly as well as the army, police and other security forces. Then, according to the F.M.L.N. representative, Rey Prendes, the Minister of Communications, unexpectedly showed up in Mexico City. "He simply called the guerrillas and spoke with the first person he found there." Prendes argued that the international community opposed the kidnapping and would turn against the guerrillas as a result. He urged the F.M.L.N. high command "to return Inés Duarte to make it seem that the operation had not been carried out on its behalf." Prendes's overtures were angrily rebuffed.

By using the cover name Castillo Front and declining to take responsibility for the kidnapping, the F.M.L.N. initially hoped to retain "some space to maneuver." "We knew that if we failed, international opinion might regard the kidnapping as a terrorist operation. We took an enormous risk." My informant noted that Prendes's attempt to link the F.M.L.N. to the kidnapping endangered all the players.

Several weeks after the kidnapping, the Salvadoran Bishop Arturo Rivera y Damas began to serve as an intermediary. When a number of other countries condemned the taking of the President's daughter, the F.M.L.N. publicly acknowledged its role in the affair and attempted with some success to convince its foreign critics of the military rationale for the action. The guerrillas agreed to release the mayors but asked for the return of ninety-six wounded fighters, as well as for amnesty for recently arrested labor activists. When there was no answer, guerrillas stormed the army training center at La Unión, killing forty-two soldiers and wounding sixty-eight others. The representative claimed that five U.S. advisers had been seen at the base.

The purpose of the La Unión attack was, he said, to show that the kidnapping was not "an isolated or desperate operation or a terrorist act." It also infuriated the army. Shortly after the raid, the President told an intermediary that he no longer had enough backing to achieve a settlement. There were even rumors that an attempt to overthrow Duarte had been halted by American diplomats.

Negotiations moved to Panama, and eventually the guerrillas released Inés Duarte, her friend and the twenty-three mayors in exchange for twenty-two political prisoners and safe passage for the ninety-six wounded guerrillas.

The F.M.L.N. representative's account of Duarte's near-overthrow, the guerrillas' uncertainty, and pressure on both sides from other governments in this hemisphere and in Europe offers a complex perspective on the Inés Duarte drama.

LUCIA ANNUNZIATA

Lucia Annunziata covers Central America for the Italian newspaper La Repubblica.

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BEAT THE DEVIL.

The Great Wedge in the West

Ian Fleming's very first James Bond novel, *Live and Let Die*, begins with the encouraging sentence, "There are moments of great luxury in the life of a secret agent," but I'm glad to report that such pleasures are not the exclusive privilege of lackeys of imperialism such as the man Bond. There are moments of great luxury in the lives of pwogwessive journalists such as yours truly, recently returned from a spasm of speechifying out West, as I shall now relate.

October 13. At 38,000 feet, somewhere over the Rockies, I read a very silly piece by John Keegan in the November *Atlantic* about the Russians in Afghanistan. Needless to say, he cannot resist invoking the Great Game, "in essence, the right to call the strategic tune in the great wedge of territory that stretches between the Himalayas, the Arabian-Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. But the Great Game is an old game. Is there a new game. . . ." Zzzzzz. Keeganed into a light doze, I fly over that great wedge of territory between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, north of the Mexican border, and land safely at San Diego airport—no mean feat, since the pilot has to plunge in over the edge of the mountains, clear the freeway, land and then apply the brakes before crashing into the homeport section of the U.S. fleet that calls the strategic tune in the great wedge of water called the Pacific. I am conscious of the surreptitious yet admiring glances of the other passengers as I stride off the plane. They no doubt sense that I am to be a Regent's Lecturer at the University of California, San Diego, at the invitation of Professor Herbert Schiller of the communications department. Here indeed are Herb and his wife, Anita, waiting to greet me.

We drive north to La Jolla amid the usual Southern California escort of Porsches and Mercedes. The Schillers take me to the top of the Tioga student residence into something called the Mandeville suite, which is to be my home for five days. Mandeville had a sound idea of people's spatial needs. Several times, as we explore it, the Schillers and I become separated and only find each other by dint of prolonged bellowing. Proceeding across my private terrace, the size of the entire *Nation* offices, we peer down at the twinkling lights of the campus, great wedges of whose territory are nourished by copious grants from the Defense Department. U.C., San Diego is to be the home of one of the "supercomputers," the new creature of computer quackery and the arms race. The soft night is filled with the rustle of professorial word processors applying for Star Wars research grants.

October 14. My penthouse seems to hang between the ocean and the mountains. To judge by the visitors' book, others have been similarly uplifted. A recent entry says, "In Memory, Ronnie Van Zant, (Lynyrd Skynyrd), Address, Heaven, 'Fly on proud bird, you're free at last.'" So far as I know, I have to make only one speech. I will have time for reading and thinking and otherwise trying to fill that great strategic wedge of ignorance that stretches north of my eyebrows and between my ears. Susan Davis, also of the communications department, arrives and hands me my schedule and such dreams dissipate. I am to teach many classes. I have never taught a class and am distraught, since it seems I will scarcely be able to snatch a moment to go off to Sea World, where Herb has told me the penguins in the Arco pavilion perform a patriotic masque and flap their wings in time with "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Faculty members talk to me gloomily about the conservatism of the students. On other campuses in the days that follow I am told the same sort of thing. This is all absurdly exaggerated. Students are nowhere near as conservative as people say they are. The mistake is to set everything in terms of yesterday. The 1960s aren't back, as Todd Gitlin recently informed *Nation* readers; the 1990s are almost here.

I read a conservative campus newspaper called *California Review* and discover the identifying code of these heirs of William Buckley: leaden facetiousness (the paper's mailing address is "The Temple of Mars the Avenger") plus a determination to have an initial at the start of one's name. Contributors include P. Joseph Moons, C. Brandon Crocker, M. Edward Alario, J. Michael Waller, A. Barry Demuth. I've heard liberals fret about conservative penetration of the campuses by well-funded periodicals, but if the *Review* is a specimen of such infiltration, there's nothing to worry about. It's deadly dull and filled with such crypto-Bolshevism as G. James Jason's attack on creationism.

I teach a class, ranting away about the media. The students listen politely, though probably a good third of them—I extrapolate from samplings over the years—find my accent incomprehensible. Herb tells me later that some found me lacking in fire. I manage to shirk a dangerous-sounding class called "Information Technology" and go swimming in the splendid outdoor pool funded by J. David Dominelli, now languishing in jail for financial fraud.

October 18. The week passes delightfully. I get to the gates of Sea World and ask about patriotic displays. The guide is befuddled. Herb must have been joking about the penguins. I give my lecture about the press and the new cold war, remembering not to get drunk beforehand and not to laugh excessively at my own anecdotes.

I pack my bags for a side trip to Scottsdale Community College, outside Phoenix. Here I pick up the spoor of Reed Irvine's Accuracy in Academia. The students give me material about Mark Reader, a professor from Arizona State University who is being harassed for corrupting the minds of his pupils with seditious doctrines. Prominent among the harassers are columnists for the A.S.U. *State Press*. It seems Reader is a peacenik. So Matthew Scully lashes out at Reader's "all-consuming dread of nuclear war, and of violence of any sort. Not too long ago men like Reader were heard muttering on street corners as they passed out their political manifestoes. Now they become college professors." I can see why people like Reader get nervous. Someone in their class may be a monitor, alert for the Red infection, taking down—usually misquoting—phrases that Irvine will later

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

hand out to the press. If the faculty or college president begins to panic under pressure from local regents or notables, things get nasty very fast. Of course the proper course is not to panic but calmly to tell Irvine and his cohorts to fuck off.

October 19. A beautiful Saturday. I drive north in an open car to Santa Barbara to address the local branch of the American Civil Liberties Union as part of a panel discussion titled "A Responsible Press?" I arrive with one minute to spare. I open my jaws to address the assembled defenders of civil liberty. Nothing comes out of my mouth. Somewhere on 101 North I have lost my voice. I croak, miss my way, swerve off the broad avenue of discourse, run into the ditch, stall. This is very bad, and made worse by the fact that I see several friends in the audience. It even appears that one of my heroes, George Dangerfield, author of *Strange Death of Liberal England*, is present. But later the jolly attorneys of Santa Barbara make me feel at home. One tells me that the ratio of imprisoned criminals in California is only exceeded, on a per capita basis, by South Africa and the Soviet Union. Another reports that a professor at U.C., Santa Barbara imparts to students his strong feeling against abortion by having the walls of his office covered with enormous pictures of fetuses.

October 20. I head to Riverside and stay with Robert and Sigrid Pollin. Bob teaches economics at U.C., Riverside. Sigrid is an architect. I have to write a column for *The Wall Street Journal* and Bob and Sigrid help me establish Riverside as a strategic wedge, symbolizing the inherent contradictions of the Reaganite economy when viewed from a Marxist perspective.

Marxists love things that rise and fall, and Bob has done great work on the falling rate of profit, the falling real wage, the falling median family income and the rising cost of getting by. By the time we're done, Riverside is as neat an illustration of Vol. 3 of *Capital* as you could hope to find and I remark in passing that there are enough Marxists at the economics department there to give Irvine a heart attack. I hear later that the local paper, owned in fact by *The Journal*, had pricked up its ears, calling the head of the department to ask what was all this about Marxism. I press on to my next gig, at the University of Colorado.

October 22. Waiting to meet me at Denver airport is Jay Berger of the university's Student Union and my old friend Sender Garlin, lifetime labor journalist and now a chipper 83. Sender and his wife have started a new life in Boulder at about the same time as most people are heading for the rocking chair. Indeed, longevity seems to be part of the family concession. His father-in-law, Joseph Millet, a charter member of the C.P.U.S.A. in 1919, has died yesterday at the age of 99. We drive to the campus, nestled spectacularly at the foot of the Rockies. Sender chats about the past. We realize that he and my father, unknown to each other, had both covered the ferocious textile strike in Gastonia, North Carolina, in 1929.

Sender is a great organizer. I am rushed from a press conference to an interview on the local public radio station and begin to appreciate that Boulder is somewhat to the left of San Diego. One hot topic of conversation is the shameful liberal backsliding of a prominent local figure who had dared compare the Soviet presence in Afghanistan with the Reagan-sponsored *contras* in Nicaragua, which I read about in the town's excellent independent radical paper, the *Colorado Daily*. I drone on about the press and the new cold war to an audience of 500, which seems to diminish as I pass the forty-five minute mark and head toward the hour.

October 24. West to Claremont Colleges, which are near Riverside, for a panel on news coverage of Central America. I'm cast in the mad dog role, with mainstream views being defended by Ed Cody of *The Washington Post*. My mistake is to go to the prepanel dinner at the First Street Bar & Grill. Under the influence of frazzled duck and four glasses of wine, I get as soft as a pussycat. I listen without screaming to the moderator, Nathaniel Davis, formerly U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala and then Chile (in 1973), recount how he was shifted from the Soviet to the Latin American desk as a diplomat because "Loy Henderson said I could tell the difference between a Communist and a land reformer." Ho ho, pass the port. Later, in his introductory remarks, Davis evenhandedly evokes the terrorist governments of "right and left alike" in Guatemala in the years after the overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz. The panel takes place in the most conservative of all the Claremont Colleges, McKenna, of which an adornment is Harry Jaffa, the Goldwater speechwriter who provided the line about extremism in defense of liberty being no vice. There'd been talk of a rough right-wing crowd, but they've all gone to the ballgame so we give panel to a pro-Sandinista pinko crowd. Fred Morris, of *Mesoamerica*, walks away with the discussion.

October 25. Free of speeches at last! I can no longer talk to anyone in less than a shout and speak to waiters like Mark Antony addressing the plebs. I call on Hind Baki, who worked with Alex Odeh at the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. Young Hind would normally get to work ten minutes ahead of Odeh. One morning Odeh went to work early and so he and not Hind got blown up by the bomb behind the door. She tells me that Odeh was a Republican and even had some sort of *pro forma* campaign medal from Reagan. Not that Reagan ever bothered to call up Mrs. Odeh, of course.

I run to the plane and enter that great strategic wedge of stupidity *The New York Times*. Here's Senator Bill Bradley writing about the Philippines and "the unchecked spread of a nationwide Communist insurgency." He calls for democracy and, needless to say, a revitalization of the army. Here's a benevolent little story about rebel Afghans firing a missile at a mosque and killing fourteen. As the plane clears the Rockies and I embark on a piece about Reagan's desire to improve relations with the Soviet Union, my eyes close amid the tedium of business as usual.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Postmodern Maladies

TERRENCE RAFFERTY

CARPENTER'S GOTHIC. *By William Gaddis. Viking. 262 pp. $16.95.*

ADVENTURES IN THE ALASKAN SKIN TRADE. *By John Hawkes. Simon & Schuster. 396 pp. $17.95.*

No good modernist would dream of writing a novel that didn't include a critique of itself. In *Carpenter's Gothic*, his third novel, William Gaddis provides the following exchange between a sinister character named Lester and the mysterious McCandless, a geologist/adventurer/novelist who owns the house where all the action takes place:

> —It doesn't end it just falls to pieces, it's mean and empty like everybody in it is that why you wrote it?
>
> —I told you why I wrote it, it's just an afterthought why are you so damned put out by it. This novel's just a footnote, a postscript.

As auto-critiques go, that's unusually harsh—and accurate. *Carpenter's Gothic* is full of elaborate schemes and hinted-at conspiracies, huge autonomous chunks of plot looming behind a screen of fragmented diction and teasing us with the possibility of coherence, only to fly apart in the end. And the people *are* pretty sickening. McCandless has a little dignity (he's the closest thing to a stand-in for the author), but the main characters are his tenants, a loutish P.R. hustler named Paul and his dishrag wife, Liz, whose only response to Paul's daily bullying is meek, hopeless withdrawal. What the slimy Lester says about McCandless's novel (his only one) is a perfect description of Gaddis's too. Does the author know? Is he, like his fictional novelist, simply too exhausted to care? Or is he playing a con man's game, poking us with his finger and daring us to understand him?

Carpenter's Gothic is, in any event, no ordinary game: it begins as Monopoly and ends as Russian roulette. The novel has a single setting, the musty Victorian house on the Hudson that Liz and Paul have rented from McCandless, and each of its long scenes consists almost entirely of run-on, Mametlike dialogue about Paul's various scams, which are at first local (an insurance case, a publicity campaign for a fundamentalist preacher) and then widen to a global conspiracy involving a multinational corporation, a senator and a South African mine. For a while, we may even imagine we know how we're meant to read this book—the game, we think, is to piece together the absurd international-thriller plot from fragments of conversation, and the prize will be the revelation of the dark connections between things, the resolution into a single plot of all the information received secondhand from visitors to the house, from radio and newspaper reports, from the constantly ringing phone. But that's not what Gaddis is up to at all. Carefully constructed as *Carpenter's Gothic* is, it doesn't reward the detective reader's diligent analysis. The plots don't add up, the architectural/geological/political/economic/theological/esthetic metaphors cancel one another out and the jangling, disconnected style turns out to be only mimetic—a mirror of chaos. It seems inconceivable, but this novel—Gaddis's first in ten years—is *designed* to be skimmed like a newspaper, half heard like a call-in show on the kitchen radio.

It's as if Gaddis had conceived a mammoth, complex work of fiction—on the scale of his earlier novels, *The Recognitions* and *JR*—and then lost heart and written this slender shadow play instead. *Carpenter's Gothic* is the ghost of a novel, not the living, breathing thing, and all that keeps us reading is the possibility of touching the narrative body it may have once inhabited. What kept Gaddis writing for ten years is harder to figure: maybe it was the impulse to justify a loss of faith in fiction, to produce an apologia for his sense of futility. There's a strange, uncalculated urgency to this novel, a rage that has nothing to do with the chilly formalism of its style. Gaddis seems to loathe his characters and their culture with a hatred too universal and too indiscriminate for satire. He's like an angry god appalled at something he's created in his own image.

Halfway through the book, the burnt-out McCandless delivers this soliloquy on the house he owns:

> It was built that way yes, it was built to be seen from outside . . . yes, they had style books, these country architects and the carpenters it was all derivative wasn't it, those grand Victorian mansions with their rooms and rooms and towering heights and cupolas and the marvelous intricate ironwork. That whole inspiration of medieval Gothic but these poor fellows didn't have it, the stonework and the wrought iron. All they had were the simple dependable old materials, the wood and their hammers and saws and their own clumsy ingenuity bringing those grandiose visions the masters had left behind down to a human scale with their own little inventions . . . a patchwork of conceits, borrowings, deceptions, the inside's a hodgepodge of good intentions like one last ridiculous effort at something worth doing even on this small a scale, because it's stood here, hasn't it, foolish inventions and all it's stood here for ninety years.

So the American novel isn't a cathedral. So the style is borrowed from European "masters," our culture provides material too humble and debased to be the vehicle of great visions, and all the artist can do is disguise his poverty with imitation and pathetic "little inventions." So *Carpenter's Gothic* is thin and deliberately superficial because it can only be "seen from outside"—because the inside doesn't bear (or deserve) scrutiny. And that's why, Gaddis tells us, there will only be afterthoughts from here on, no more grand edifices like *The Recognitions* or *JR*. He's seen the light at last, made the bitter discovery that his world just isn't good enough for his art.

This is an astonishing message, but it's the only possible reason for the book's existence, the only explanation for its sour, contemptuous tone and its formal bad faith. The real story of *Carpenter's Gothic* isn't the end of the world, it's the end of the imagination, the world gone dark in the writer's head. And the real art of this novel is the art of the suicide note, the nasty, labored-over kind that pins the blame on everything and everyone that dares to remain alive.

John Hawkes is, like Gaddis, an ambitious and unconventional writer, and his new novel is about (among other

Terrence Rafferty writes a regular column on fiction for The Nation.

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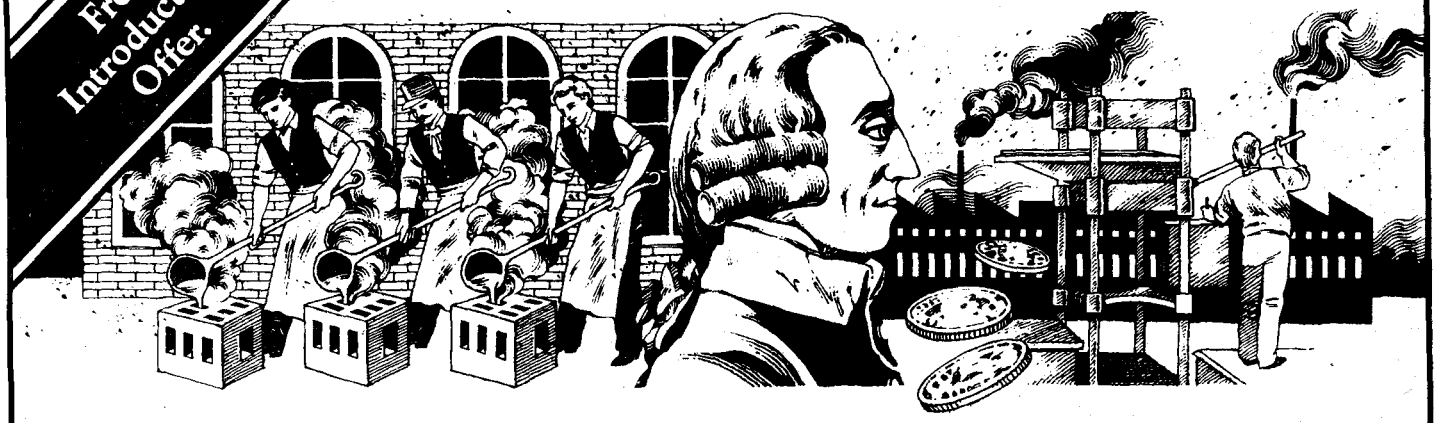

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things) storytelling and suicide. But Hawkes isn't a burnt-out case himself. *Adventures in the Alaskan Skin Trade* is his tenth novel and it isn't a footnote or a postscript to anything; it is, by a wide margin, his longest book. Hawkes is a purely imaginative writer and an overwhelmingly sensual one, who keeps himself refreshed simply by moving his obsessions and fancies to different locales and letting the climate determine the form they'll take. In northern settings—the England of *The Lime Twig*, the Germany of *The Passion Artist*—his fiction is cold and claustrophobic; in the tropical climates of *Second Skin* and *The Blood Oranges* the writing is languid, gently but constantly aroused. He's not a monument builder or even a beleaguered homeowner; he lives his imaginative life out of a suitcase.

Adventures in the Alaskan Skin Trade is the story of Jake Deauville, a hearty, clean-living American from a good Connecticut family who takes his wife and his daughter off to Alaska in 1929. It's told by his daughter, Sunny, who has become, almost forty years later, the proprietor of an Alaskan whorehouse. What fascinates Hawkes about Jake is that he may have gone to Alaska solely for the purpose of having adventures to spin yarns about. The key scenes in this book are the elaborately suspenseful campfire tales Jake relates to his trembling wife and daughter after pointlessly brave expeditions into the Alaskan wilderness. There's no indication that Jake is a liar—he's a complete innocent—but he seems to know instinctively some cunning techniques of narrative seduction. He knows, for instance, that his long absences create an ideal audience at home: listeners primed by the possibility of emptiness and loss, fearful that they'll never hear the familiar voice again or even hear the story of its end. When Jake finally does disappear for good, he leaves a void in his daughter's consciousness—in the absence of stories, her recurring dreams try to complete the story of her father's final adventure.

The problem with the novel is that Hawkes isn't a natural storyteller. He's too easily distracted by the look of the light, the feel of tight Western jeans against the skin, the punishing cold of an Alaskan morning. The sentences roll on, beautifully, absorbing more and more of the physical world as they go, but Jake's stories don't hold us the way they're meant to, the way they hold his listeners in the novel. Hawkes's impersonation of a naïve yarn-spinner is an obvious stunt, and once we've got the idea it becomes tiresome. Unlike Jake's expectant family, we're in constant fear that there *will* be another story.

Jake's sense of story is, after all, just a place Hawkes is visiting, Jack London territory. *Adventures in the Alaskan Skin Trade* is big and shapeless and it moves like a glacier, but it's partially redeemed by the author's obvious pleasure in shedding his own skin and becoming (however unsuccessfully) a different kind of American writer. He doesn't condescend to Jake's narrative style, and his aim in imitating it is to demonstrate the grip it had on the imagination of his own (and Sunny's) generation, to show how the exotic and the familiar, the worldly and the innocent, combine to charge their dreams. "It is up to me," Sunny says, "to discover how and why it happens that lust and innocence are only two faces in the same pool," and she seems, in the end, to succeed. Her father killed himself, but his innocence survives somewhere in his daughter's experienced body. What survives in Hawkes isn't, certainly, the crude narrative skill of earlier American fiction—he's too self-conscious for that—but something like its adventurous, exploratory spirit. For him, the world hasn't quite exhausted itself yet. □

The Doldrums Duet

NICHOLAS XENOS

SOCIALISM AND AMERICA. *By Irving Howe. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 225 pp. $17.95.*

TAKING SIDES: The Education of a Militant Mind. *By Michael Harrington. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 278 pp. $16.95.*

In his autobiography, *A Margin of Hope*, Irving Howe reports a conversation with George Kateb in the mid-1960s during which Kateb told Howe, "The trouble with your social democratic politics is that it's so boring!" Howe confesses that Kateb's remark has haunted him over the years. With good reason, judging from the latest contribution by the editor of *Dissent* to the politics of incrementalism.

Kateb's hit notwithstanding, Howe clearly does not see himself as mired in an intellectual or political bog. He announces at the outset of these essays that "sustained self-scrutiny, hard self-criticism, and, perhaps in consequence, a partial self-renewal: these are the order of the day." But this scrutiny and criticism seldom fall on Howe himself. The targets, as so often in his writing, are others on the left, particularly those who cling to some notion of revolution. When he does engage in self-criticism, it is his former self that takes the blame—the socialist militant of the 1930s who was impatient with his Old Guard elders and who turned his back on anyone tainted with involvement in the traditional party structure. Today's Howe embraces such involvement, desperately trying to tack a socialist vision onto liberal Democratic politics. But it is curious that someone who so clearly identifies himself with the history of American socialism doesn't subject the *idea* of socialism to critical scrutiny. Or perhaps it isn't so curious, since such scrutiny might reveal that he has no coherent idea to lead him out of his boredom.

The bulk of this book consists of lectures Howe gave in 1981 on "Socialism and America." They begin with the "golden age" of Eugene V. Debs and trace a history of defeat and decline. Addressing the question of American exceptionalism, Howe comes up with an interpretive reversal that epitomizes his political stance. From the outset, he says, socialism in America was dogged by a "fierce yet innocent native radicalism" that undermined the steady growth of a political movement and sacrificed hard-won reforms for instant results and moral rectitude. Howe repeatedly characterizes this indigenous radicalism as "fundamentalist" and contrasts it with the "more considered" approach of people such as labor leader Morris Hillquit, who championed reform unionism and spoke for and to a largely immigrant audience.

American radicals didn't threaten Debs's Socialists in the years before World War I, Howe says, because the

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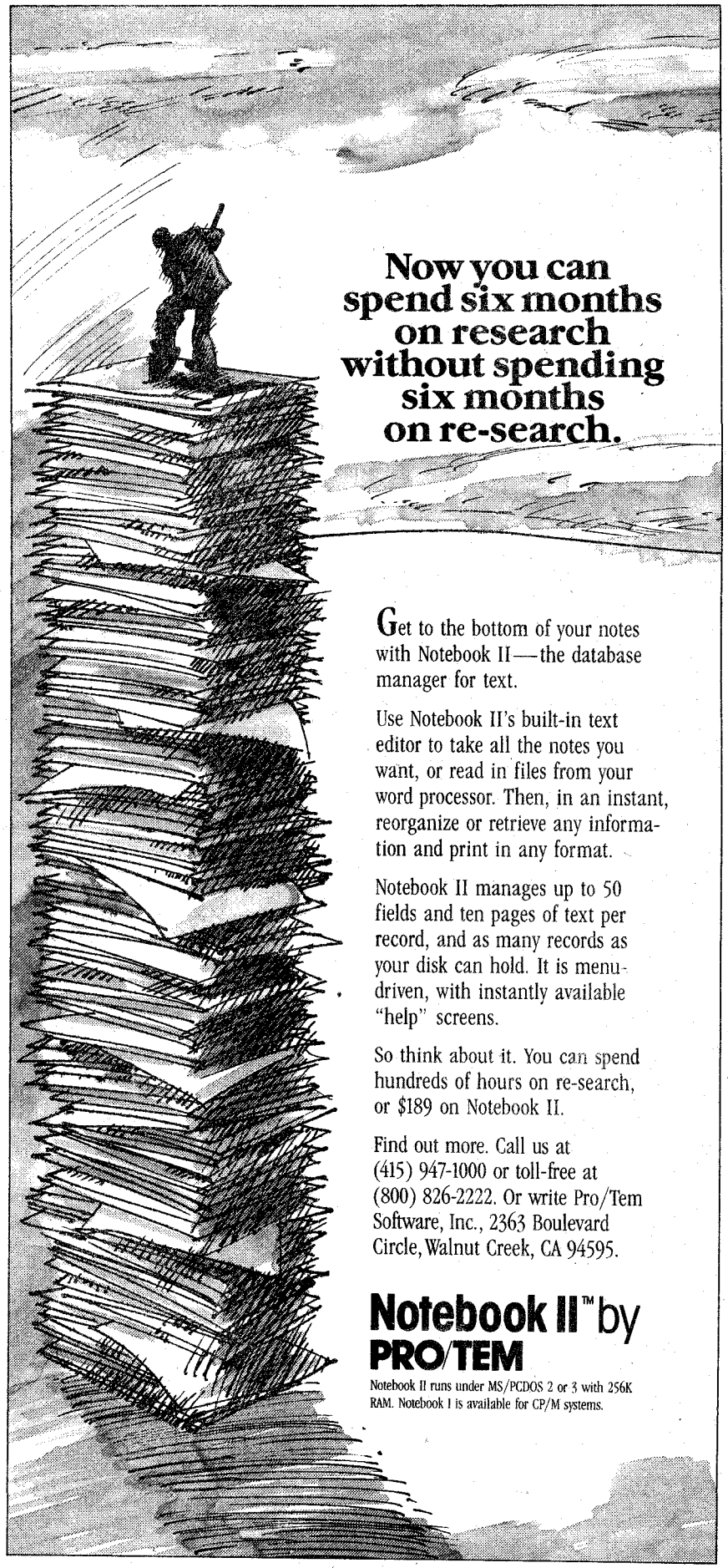
party was a loose federation of regional groups; but the intransigence of the Oklahoma Socialists and the "still more radical or perhaps more fundamentalist" Wobblies was to run afoul of the immigrant moderates later on. One could argue in this vein that socialism in America is an import grafted onto a radicalism incomprehensible in European terms—a graft that didn't take, leaving the tree to die while the branch grew, albeit slowly and unnaturally. But Howe's reversal brings him to argue instead that it was the immigrant socialists who had a better sense of "the distinctive characteristics of American life and society," characteristics which are never actually spelled out by Howe but which amount to a simple desire for reform. In this context, the American radicals are seen as sectarian, moralistic and anachronistic, while the immigrant socialists are open, pragmatic, in step with their age.

Yet Howe insists that American radicalism runs deep, touching what he calls "the American myth of a covenant blessing the new land" while at the same time finding expression in an Emersonian individualism he deeply distrusts. If Howe has a program, it is to co-opt the covenant myth for the socialist cause, jettisoning Emerson along the way. Separating the myth from its expression is an act of political strategy—one, Howe argues, that socialists must learn from the Communist Party's Popular Front. The task for socialism in this country is clear to Howe:

> It must either enter deadly combat with and destroy the covenant myth or must look for some way of making its vision of the good society seem a fulfillment of that myth. Both are difficult propositions, but I need hardly say which is the less so.

Hardly, but then there is the problem of that vision. Howe nowhere says plainly what he takes "socialism" to mean. He repeatedly refers to capitalism, socialism and "intermediary or mixed states" between them. In this scheme, pure capitalism is a market economy and pure socialism is a planned one, but Howe identifies himself with the intermediary states.

Fearing excessive state control over society, Howe's socialism doesn't aim to realize itself, merely to introduce as much of the real thing as is practical and necessary. "Socialists," Howe says, "propose to extend and thereby fulfill traditional liberal goals by moving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toward a democratization of economic and social life." So he outlines some familiar "transitional" steps that could be taken, mixing in elements of indicative planning, worker self-management, controlled markets, competitive incentives and selective nationalization. Howe takes up ideas of economic democracy, "social property" and "socialization" as proposals to emphasize "the separation of political and economic power."

Notoriously hostile to the New Left's advocacy of participatory democracy, Howe is more than willing to entertain such a notion as long as it is restricted to the economy—and limited even there. His socialism is at home with the representative institutions of the contemporary state. Indeed, the turn to liberalism for Howe is a turn toward a traditional political discourse about "perennial problems," the most salient of which is "the problem of representation." The state has now achieved a measure of independence from the economy, and Howe argues "tentatively" that this means "that the liberal insistence upon politics as a mode of autonomous human action with 'laws' and 'rules' of its own has come to have a new persuasiveness, not least of all within socialist thought."

In fact, the alleged autonomy of the liberal state is more complicated than that. Draped in the mantle of popular sovereignty, the liberal state has seemingly freed up citizens to pursue their private concerns while their representatives look after the public interest. But the state has its own interest—power. In the manner of the schoolmaster rulers de Tocqueville warned us of, the state has been concentrating its power while benevolently extending it into a thousand details of everyday life, invited there by citizens grown accustomed to turning toward it for sustenance and protection. The American radicals Howe disdains have been fighting that centralizing process and the dependency it entails from the outset while Howe remains committed to it. It's fair to say that representative government and democracy in America have been at odds with each other and that the democratic spirit, whatever else it may be, is not liberal. Nowhere in Howe's essays is there the least sign of appreciation for questions of political scale, yet questions of that kind are at the heart of the American debate between representation and participation, state and locality, and community and individuality. Howe takes the state-centered political structure as it is and tries to work through it to effect the changes in economy and society he thinks socialism is about. That's why his vision isn't transformative but perpetually transitional. He's got one foot in the welfare state and the other one up in the air with nowhere to plant it. He's constantly trying to keep from stepping on his own toes.

If Howe is the self subsumed in the socialist movement, Michael Harrington is the ego turned loose. Where Howe is tentative and given to expressions of doubt, Harrington is self-assured and in control of historical destiny. Together they make a neat, if predictable, package, as readers of their Marx-Engels impersonation done as a "dialogue" on the left in *The New York Times Magazine* in June 1984 will recall. Howe's book is dedicated to Harrington (and Michael Walzer); Harrington's to Howe. Neat.

Taking Sides collects some of Harrington's principal articles published in various magazines between 1955 and 1983. The collection spans Harrington's socialist career, including his contributions to debates over McCarthyism and Stalinism (he opposed them both), the Vietnam War and the New Left (he tried to oppose them both) and the role of socialists vis-à-vis the Democratic Party. The essays display his characteristic combination of optimism coupled with the view that history is approaching a crossroads of socialism or barbarism. Harrington has no doubt which path will be taken. As he puts it in one of the introductory autobiographical notes he has scattered around the book, "My socialism . . . is not a faith, in that it is based upon the rational, analytic assessment of an economic and social necessity which I see before my very eyes—the necessity of creating an utterly new form of society if human freedom is to survive the results of human creativity." Harrington does a cheap imitation of Pascal, asserting that "I will end my life without ever knowing if the wager I have made, that the necessity will become possible, is true or not," but even that has a cheery ring to it. The fact is that because Harrington sees socialism as a logical extension of monopoly capitalism and the welfare state, he's got history on his side. All that's needed are a few economic crises—such as the oil crunch a decade

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ago, which Harrington thought would help the socialist cause—to show the need for democratic, as opposed to corporate, planning. That, and the acceptance of socialism as a legitimate term in American political discourse, should propel us on our way toward catching up with Sweden, Harrington's own vision of the future that works.

If Howe's immigrants brought socialist moderation to America, Harrington gives the impression that the next step is to reverse the flow and immigrate to Europe. Particularly since becoming involved in the Socialist International (first in 1976 as representative of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, then, from 1982, of the Democratic Socialists of America), Harrington has sought his models, as the old song has it, "Over There." When he helped organize an international meeting in Washington in 1980, the dais sported Olof Palme, Willy Brandt and François Mitterrand—a democratic socialist holy trinity surrounding the beaming Harrington. With Palme and Mitterrand in office, Harrington's smile has faded a bit. In an essay analyzing the French Socialists' record, Harrington acknowledges that Reaganesque austerity measures have become the order of the day, and passes some of the blame off on a balance-of-payments crunch precipitated by insufficient capital investment by previous conservative governments and on Mitterrand's dual commitment to investment and higher wages.

Echoing themes that Howe develops concerning the problems of transition, Harrington soberly assesses the need to hold down consumption in order to stimulate real growth (though he also thinks the Great American Surplus will get American socialists around that problem). But then he regains his cheerful composure—after all, even with cutbacks, the French welfare system is still way ahead of ours and the French Socialists won't abandon the poor in the manner of Reagan or Thatcher (a comparison that gets him very near the bottom of his rhetorical barrel). Even better, it looks as if the Swedish Socialists, despite their own anticonsumption policies, will get Mitterrand and the rest of us off the hook by providing programmatic guidelines for the future. The new idea is "Wage Earner Funds, a form of decentralized social ownership, which puts workers and community representatives on the

A N E W B O O K

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boards of private corporations." For Harrington, this is enough evidence that "very practical socialist ideas could flow south from Scandinavia once again." The yuppies have their Saabs and Harrington has his Wage Earner Funds. Where would we be without Swedish ingenuity?

So the choice between socialism and barbarism comes down to alternative policies for dealing with the difficulties of today's national economies. Reagan and Thatcher are the barbarians; the socialists are the humane people who are trying to keep the welfare state intact. This is an old story, an expanding-pie liberalism with a fancy socialist label. But Howe and Harrington both insist that this is the only sane politics for the foes of barbarism. Indeed, they dote on organizational and technical issues as if not to do so is morally inexcusable. Theirs is an organization man socialism that is bound to treat alternative views as sectarian, romantic or both. Like the Progressives and the New Dealers, these Fabian socialists, as Howe describes himself, are comfortable in the presence of the megastate. Their vision begins and ends there. What Howe says of the socialist Old Guard applies equally well to himself and Harrington:

> They had lost the taste for insurgency, something you might suppose socialists would have as their birthright. They failed to understand what it was about American life in 1933 that might drive a young person to the excesses of "leftism." Their minds still worked, but their imaginations had closed down. □

The Canonization

GEOFFREY O'BRIEN

THE HARVARD BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY. *Edited by Helen Vendler. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 440 pp. $20.*

As an essayist, Helen Vendler is often more enthralling than the poets she writes about. Her real gift, exemplified in *Part of Nature, Part of Us*, is for a quasi-fictional portraiture in which the critique of a literary career serves as pretext for a novelistic delineation of emotional structures. Give her the complex self-dramatization of Robert Lowell, the wrenching metamorphoses of Adrienne Rich, the ebullient mental cinema of Frank O'Hara, and her narrative skills come richly to life. By the same token a poetry not wedded to a drama of self, a poetry in which the poet may disappear to give freer play to pattern or melody or the selfless steady state of meditation, gives her little to feed on; hence, for example, her relative indifference to Imagism and the poetries that have evolved from it. This bias toward the vivid presentation of a personality leads her to writers whose public personas are already well established. Sometimes the poetry becomes little more than an aid to clarifying the poet's character: "Berryman has come a long way to find Henry, and, in Henry, some liberated dimension of himself."

The fluctuations of authorial temperament are set against a fairly fixed standard of poetic value. Consequently, while she is unsurpassed in the analysis of a particular kind of literary role-playing, one does not turn to Vendler for the discovery of more eccentric or self-effacing talents or for subversion of the prevailing canon. On the contrary, she is never more at ease than when paying homage to those already enshrined and tends to be more interested in the continuity of a tradition than in the sudden brutal disjunctions by which poetry or any art keeps itself alive. When she writes of modern American poetry, the shades of Coleridge, Keats and Tennyson are never far away, as if their fundamental gestures might be resurrected in updated form—new hairstyles, new lingo—without any break in the line of succession. For poetry that seeks to start from scratch and rethink its function altogether she has no sympathy. Reviewing the Jerome Rothenberg/George Quasha anthology *America a Prophecy* some years ago, she dismissed it as a hippie effusion rather than recognizing its serious—and highly influential—attempt at a fresh reading of the past.

Vendler has usually preferred to pass over in silence those poets to whom

Geoffrey O'Brien is a poet and a regular contributor to The Village Voice.

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she isn't responsive, which from a reviewer's point of view makes good sense: hostile readings rarely illuminate. An anthology, however, raises other questions, particularly when it bears the double imprimatur of Harvard University and the critic who has been called—in an accolade that could equally well serve as condemnation—"the legitimate successor to R.P. Blackmur and Randall Jarrell." Although Vendler carefully notes that "this anthology can be nothing more than a sampling of what seems to my taste satisfying," *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry* will inevitably be taken as a canonical assessment of recent work. Judged in these terms, it represents a profoundly conservative retreat from the new—not just the new of today, but the new of the past half-century. Earlier mainstream statements like M.L. Rosenthal's 1967 *The New Poets* or Richard Ellmann's 1976 *New Oxford Book of American Verse* seem flamboyantly radical by comparison.

The only surprises here lie in what has been left out. In reducing seventy years of work to selections from thirty-five poets, Vendler has essentially scraped away whatever avant-gardist barnacles had managed to get a tentative grip on the good ship Poetic Tradition. What remains is a hard core of entrenched favorites, most of them already part of the standard curriculum; a full forty-seven of these poems, for example, can be found in Ellmann's book. The resulting collection of what are justly known as "anthology pieces" gives little sense of origins or context or ultimate direction. There is none of the formal coherence, the mapping of vital interconnections, that the best anthologies provide. At most, by its choice of material from recent decades, the book inadvertently describes a winding down, a steady dwindling of energy following an earlier burst of splendor.

It opens, in a kind of Prologue in Heaven, amid that splendor. The word "contemporary," it should be noted, has been given a startlingly free interpretation. These are the first lines we come upon: "Complacencies of the peignoir, and late/ Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair . . . " But isn't that Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning," published in *Harmonium* in 1923 and actually written in 1915? On to the next poet: "I've known rivers . . ." The words could hardly be more familiar, since Langston Hughes's deservedly

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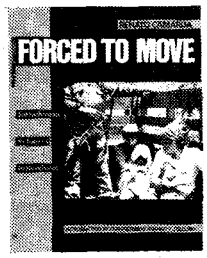

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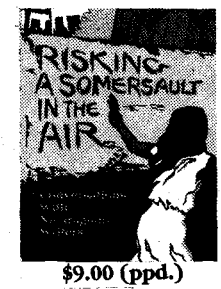

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celebrated "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" appeared in 1921—when Hughes was 19 and the Harlem Renaissance barely more than an anticipatory gleam—and has since been anthologized as much as any poem of this century. A suspicion dawns that Vendler is laying down some historical background, and that we are to be presented with the other major figures of the 1920s and 1930s; either that, or we've picked up by mistake some ancient Louis Untermeyer or Conrad Aiken collection, and can expect before long to encounter John Gould Fletcher, Elinor Wylie and the rest of that ghostly cavalcade.

What follows only deepens the sense of historical confusion. After the initial selections by Stevens and Hughes, we're catapulted forward to confront a familiar lineup. Roethke, Bishop, Jarrell, Berryman, Lowell, Nemerov, Wilbur: the names roll inexorably into place like the chord changes of an old standard. At least we know where we are—in the Miltown-and-alcohol-drenched 1950s, where deep in the heart of "the comfy suburbs" (Wilbur) the poets weave their nervous breakdowns into delicately crafted artifacts. By now we're impatient to get on. The book's nearly half over, and we haven't advanced much past 1960. One hadn't expected a survey of contemporary poetry to be so much a museum tour. Wasn't there a revolution in there somewhere that livened things up for a while?

The ferment of the 1960s is audible in Vendler's selection only as a muffled roar. It could not be excluded altogether, of course, but once again she has opted for the pantheon nearest to hand—Ginsberg, Snyder, Plath, Rich, Sexton, O'Hara, Merwin—rather than venture any deeper reassessment. In this context poets like Ginsberg and O'Hara function as token experimentalists; and their work seems curiously out of place, since we've been given no clue as to what soil they sprang from or what poetic company they kept. They are displayed as isolated individuals rather than as part of any larger tendency. Nor do we learn what further work was stimulated by their influence; the message instead comes across as, "Thus far, and no farther." In the brief final section devoted to the 1970s and 1980s, an overriding concern with controlled surfaces has displaced any urge to cut loose. Subject matter narrows ever more tightly around the subjective "I"; the first-person singular, which in its time has served as a liberation for poetry, now seems a constraint. The poets look at themselves in mirrors, in family photographs, in their own manuscripts and transcribe with a kind of penitent intensity the perceived distortions. Disembarking, after 400 pages, we can't help wondering where we've been. We've seen some admirable monuments and some dazzlingly well-trimmed gardens—Vendler's taste is acute within its adopted limits—but an impression lingers of exhibits stacked up like so many Potemkin villages. There was supposed, after all, to be a wilderness out there, a wealth of open space from which we've been shielded.

The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry leaves out large and central stretches of the terrain its title promises. The omission is, I think, not an accident of taste but a systematic exclusion, aimed not at scattered poets but an alternate tradition of writing. Its root can be found in a curious passage of Vendler's introduction: "This collection opens with the poetry of Stevens, since he flowered late and came into his own only after the 1955 publication of the *Collected Poems*; he is the chief link between the earlier high modernists (Eliot, Pound, Williams, Crane, Moore) and the later poets." This extraordinary bit of historical reconstruction ignores, for one thing, the fact that the "earlier" poets cited were all younger than Stevens, and that while the poems of *Harmonium* were collected tardily, they appeared in magazines contemporaneously with those of the "high" confrères. Williams in particular was almost as much a late bloomer as Stevens, not hitting his stride until *Al Que Quiere!*, just six years before *Harmonium*; and while Stevens received a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award in 1955, Williams didn't "come into his own" until he was under the sod, with a posthumous Pulitzer for *Pictures From Brueghel* in 1963. More to the point, one wonders in what sense Stevens could be construed as a "link" between Williams and more recent writing. Williams was a formal innovator of revolutionary impact whose technical originality is still being digested; Stevens, on the other hand, was a great and idiosyncratic visionary whose needs were perfectly served by a derivative iambic line and a relatively unvarying format.

At issue is more than a marginal question of dating or metrical analysis. By making Stevens serve as some kind of priestly intermediary, Vendler denies the very direct and powerful influence of Williams on subsequent poets. This is hardly surprising, since the poets most clearly displaying that influence—the Objectivist grouping of Kenneth Rexroth, Charles Olson, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Hilda Morley, Paul Blackburn—are nowhere to be found within her pages. The list of the absent could be extended, of course, to include Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, William Bronk, Amiri Baraka, Jerome Rothenberg, Diane Wakoski, Cid Corman, to name only a few relatively venerable figures. These are individuals who personify the sweep and the inventiveness of latter-day American poetry. They speak for a desire to break out of the reified boundaries of the poem as art object, and in so doing to embark on a more uncertain but also more exciting engagement with the poem as medium of contact with the world.

By contrast Vendler emphasizes an esthetic of display—"brilliance of manner," "authority of style"—which at its worst degenerates into the poet self-consciously pointing at his own effects. In *Part of Nature, Part of Us*, Vendler quotes a revealing dialogue between herself and Robert Lowell. Lowell has been commenting ruefully on the way critics describe his work: "'Why don't they ever say what I'd like them to say?' he protested. 'What's that?' I asked. 'That I'm heartbreaking,' he said, meaning it." To which she approvingly adds, "And so he is." Lowell's poetry—and he is only the clearest, because the most brilliant, example of a prevailing mode—often seems a solicitation of pity, with all the resources of observed detail mustered to focus attention on the poet's anguish. His sorrow draws language to it like a magnet: phrases like "the withering autumn sky" and "the petrified fairway" and "the hill's skull" reveal not the presence of the world but the presence of Lowell. Evidence of the author's suffering becomes a verification of sincerity.

When Lowell describes his own book of poems as "my open coffin," he evokes a vision of poetic form as a gilded but claustrophobic enclosure. In opposition to that one might quote Robert Kelly's credo, "Style is death," or bring up Williams's statement about the effect of poetry on a hypothetical reader being a byproduct irrelevant to its cen-

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tral process, or one might simply recall the myriad ways in which American poets have fought off petrification through an opening up of formal boundaries. I don't mean to imply anything so simple as a moralized showdown, good projectivists versus bad academics, or variable-footed organics against metronomic rigids. The slogans are crude signposts to an infinitely subtle, variegated, contradictory territory; but the issues they imply are real enough.

Such slogans come into existence when writers get the feeling of being shut out from a hearing. By now I would have thought that the old battle cries could be safely retired, that some common ground, however tentative, had emerged from the ruckus of the past thirty years. After reading Helen Vendler's book, however, I'm not so sure. Given the sweeping nature of her attempt to recast history, it may be necessary to drag out the war paint and the spirit drums and stage the revolution of the word all over again. □

Plainsongs

DOUGLAS CRASE

A FEW DAYS. *By James Schuyler. Random House. 91 pp. $14.95. Paper $8.95.*

By the end of 1965, James Schuyler had lived with the Fairfield Porter family for five of the twelve years he was to spend as a virtual member of the household—"on the whole a very harmonious and pleasant household" is how Porter himself described it in a letter to a friend. For Porter, those were the important years when he had begun to paint in the style that would make him the greatest American realist of the century. Schuyler, sixteen years younger, had yet to see his first commercially published book of poems and was coming to terms meanwhile with the illness he has borne recurrently since. So the Porters must have been widely admired for the way they included the young poet in their lives. It's in this context that you can hear the sparkle of the remark attributed to Frank O'Hara, who, as he and Barbara Guest were driving past the Porters' winter home in Southampton, New York, turned to her and announced: "The *éminence grise* in *that* house is James Schuyler."

Now the years have turned wit into insight. With the publication of Schuyler's fifth collection of poems, *A Few Days*, it is even clearer that we have witnessed one of those great friendships between painter and poet that can enliven both arts and enrich a national heritage. In an interview, Schuyler was asked if he ever wrote poems about Porter's paintings. "No," he said, "but I tried to write poems that were like his paintings"—a project whose result, to my ears, is a body of the most bracing poetry written in North America over the past twenty-five years. Just as Porter became the central figure for painters who believed in an art outside the expressionist mainstream, so Schuyler is for younger poets an eminent example of instruction outside the workshop, of a poetry to fit what he has called "the pure pleasure of/simply looking."

Anyone who has read Schuyler will know that "simply looking" may be more complicated than it sounds. More rewarding too: the poet's previous volume, *The Morning of the Poem*, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1981, and the title poem of his *Hymn to Life*, 1974, is surely a contemporary masterpiece. But readers who are encountering Schuyler for the first time are going to be surprised, as they turn the pages of *A Few Days*, to find lines like these:

> . . . This coffee is cold. The eighteen-
> cup pot
> like most inventions
> doesn't work so well. A few days: how
> to celebrate them?
> It's today I want
> to memorialize but how can I? What is
> there to it?
> Cold coffee and
> a ham-salad sandwich? A skinny peach
> tree holds no
> peaches. Molly howls
> at the children who come to the door.
> What did they
> want? It's the wrong
> time of year for Girl Scout cookies.
> ("A Few Days")

Now if poetry is almost incredibly one of the effects of analogy, as Wallace Stevens said it was in his magnificent lecture on the subject, then what is remarkable about such lines from Schuyler's new title

Douglas Crase is the author of The Revisionist *(Little, Brown).*

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poem is the near total absence of analogy in its ordinary sense. Where are the similes, where are the words "like" and "as" that usually identify what we think of as descriptive writing?

The absence of those words is especially notable today, when a new fashion for analogizing seems to have overtaken our writers and momentarily awed the critics. Of course, the temptations of the practice are hardly new. In his lecture Stevens went on to cite Virgil's attempt to persuade us, in the *Georgics*, that farmers forget their worries in winter the way sailors adorn the poop with garlands when their ship reaches port. It works, as Stevens pointed out, only if you think about it, and by that time you have lost interest. It lacks the discipline of "rightness." Schuyler once came close to the same formulation himself—"it's/The just rightness that counts," he wrote—and in this regard he seems to consider analogies inherently untrustworthy. In his previous collection he was so scrupulous in the employment of similes, for example, that they were confined either to lines quoted from other people or to a group of poems that originated during the poet's stay in a mental hospital; not once in the whole book did the word "like" or "as" occur in the poet's own free voice.

But look what he can do without them. In the few lines already set out here, the ones introduced by the cold coffee, he paints in the apathetic beauty of a whole suburban paradise by letting the things in the picture reveal themselves by their own actions. We come to distinguish the coffee pot because it does not work, the dog because it howls and the season of the year because it is not Girl Scout cookie time. The impression is of things tactfully left alone, to stand forth naturally, and there could hardly be a more loving technique. In the long run, maybe it's true that you can't make poetry without annihilating the boundaries between the loved thing and your green thought of it. But a poetry that emphasizes distinctions rather than analogies is one way a poet may try at least to postpone the consumption in words of the very thing whose distinctive loveliness is what moved him to praise it in the first place.

That transitional meantime is unquestionably where Schuyler's best poems reside, and by now he has all but patented a number of seductive devices

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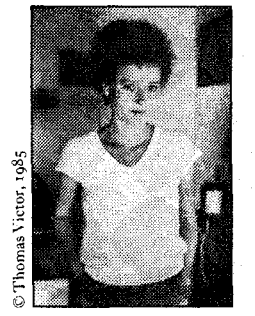

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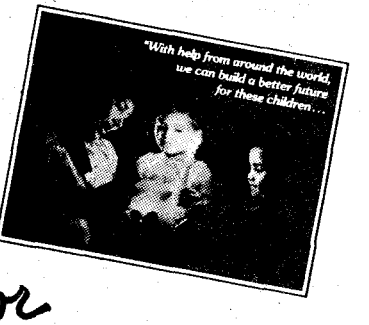

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to get you to join him there. The trick, as in the poem "Cornflowers," is to involve you in the act of making distinctions as you read:

> the cornflowers (or are they
> bachelor's buttons?) stand . . .

You choose the species, and perhaps the flowers are real. Read on, and be beguiled with the possibility of real weather, real places and actual people, too: "if/you hold your breath and make a wish," we are told in the title poem, "you'll meet Virgil Thomson in the elevator." All this speciation is enlivening in itself. It is also a setup, because when the poet *does* deploy one of those analogies whose absence you've started to take for granted, the surprise can be liberating and swift. No one else has Schuyler's genius for likening objects or attitudes to surprisingly apposite events:

> . . . The sun is off the balcony,
> the air is cool
> as one of Barbara's kisses, which don't
> make me feel
> I turn her on.

The cumulative effect is of a poetry that wants always to be on the move. For a moment, you can almost believe that we might truly be restored via poetry to the comings and goings of life, where our knowledge of reality is something made in the tissue of time. It is a triumph of Schuyler's style that his poems seem to bring that possibility within reach, a triumph admired among poets along the whole spectrum from the Poetry Project in Manhattan to the departments of English in California.

Yet there is more to poets and poetry than technical achievement, and the Schuyler style implies a question that is rarely asked about our poets: Do they write poetry out of boredom and dissatisfaction with the world or out of love for it? When you consider the popularity among poets of the various prescriptions for altering their lives, making things new or making them strange, then it is logical to conclude that a large proportion must believe the world is either hiding secrets or inadequate. By contrast, it would take a poet who believes the world is both lovely and fully on display to assert, as Schuyler does in "A Few Days," "I/have always been/more interested in truth than in imagination." To a poet like that, reality would be the one thing that is *not* commonplace, that is redemptive and unimaginable, and it would stand to reason that life cannot be lived fully unless reality is faced without embarrassment or flinch:

> . . . pleasure takes
> many forms: keep it
> simple is the best bet. I especially hate
> the picture of two
> Scotties with pink bows
> on their heads. Sentimentality can go
> further than the door to
> the cellar and the
> braid of garlic. Guess I'm ready for
> lunch: ready as I'll
> ever be, that is.
> Lunch was good: now to move my
> bowels. That was good too:
> "Oh shit," she said,
> "I stepped in some doggy pooh,"
> Worse things could happen
> to you. Meeting a
> man-eating tiger in the street, for
> instance.

It's an unmistakable voice. In this age when people are increasingly cowed into euphemism, James Schuyler is stalwart for those realities that link every one of us.

Stalwart, but he is not thumbing his nose. Instead, I think his poetry offers its lessons in a spirit of almost democratic charity. All of us must have had the experience, if only to a slight degree, of a moment when our bodies insist so strongly on misperceiving reality that we can't correct the inappropriate moods that have been induced. In "A Few Days," one of the days in question is distinguished by the poet's anticipation of a long-awaited dinner party. Yet once he gets to the party, things go wrong. Although he is taking Antabuse to keep from drinking, at the moment he means to ask for coffee he asks for a drink instead. The mistake is inexplicable, even to himself, but he "faces it out" and the result is a predictable disaster, reflected immediately thereafter in the confusion that attacks the poem itself.

How could the lesson be clearer? To misperceive is to suffer; to say the wrong thing has *physical* consequences. If a single misstatement is an injury, then a collection of such injuries can be fatal: euphemism, disinformation, hype and, yes, analogy—these are way stations on the road to death. But I am putting the lesson at its grimmest when it is one of Schuyler's characteristic charms to say the most serious things in diverting ways, as witness the sequence "The Fireproof Floors of Witley Court":

> Put to the test in a fire
> the firemen could not extinguish
> the fireproof floors
> failed to distinguish
> themselves and are no longer
> really to be trusted
>
> Visitor to Witley Court
> enter at your peril
>
> ("Witley Court")

Seen like this, it is just plain practical to learn to love reality.

The trouble is, the project does not get any easier. "Things should get better as you/grow older," writes Schuyler in his title poem, "but that/is not the way." The way, instead, is that at 62 his life has been increasingly restricted to the space of his room in the Chelsea Hotel with its view of 23rd Street, a street which "hasn't got much/going for it." In this diminished condition, not unlike the one that waits for everybody, even a poet may find it hard to go on making distinctions. "The morning/passes," he begins at one point, it passes—how?—"like an elephant in no stampede." One gets the exasperation of this, and the humor. Maybe even the heroism. If the poet does not have the physical range he had when he went every year with the Porters from their winter home in Southampton to their summer place in Penobscot Bay, he will still tell the truth—about what? About the balustrade outside his window, about his assistant, Tom, and his unrequited love for same, about the birthdays of absent friends, about the commonly enjoyed possessions (the moon, television) of those who live in isolation in New York. Yes, he implies in a lovely elegy on the death of his mother, the recipe for approaching death is to be an "old truth-teller," nothing smoothed over, to the end.

In the world of public relations, which is a large part of the world we live in now, there is a well-known piece of advice to the contrary. You are not here to get it right, so the saying goes; you are here to put a spin on it. Engagingly put, this is the habit of mind that gives us preachers who can imagine that abortion is like the Holocaust, an attorney general who can say that affirmative action is like slavery, a President who can tell us that mercenaries in Nicaragua are *like* the Founding Fathers. James Schuyler has struggled all his creative life against the temptation to impose this kind of spin on things. As a result, despite his years of diminishing prospects in the Chelsea Hotel and despite the diminishing constitutional prospects facing his country as a whole,

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"...great revolutions..." *"We know lots of revolutions, great revolutions, and magnificent people, who after taking over power, produced systems that were much worse than the ones they destroyed. We don't want to make this mistake. We will not."*

--Polish Solidarity leader Lech Walesa in a "Morning Edition" interview in Gdansk, Poland, with National Public Radio's European correspondent Neal Conan.

"I never share blame, I never share credit, and I never share desserts. It's just not my style."

--Beverly Sills, New York City Opera general director, in an interview on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition."

"Drunk they (the Russians) defeated Napoleon. Drunk they beat Hitler. Drunk they could win against NATO."

--Edward Luttwak, defense analyst and author of "The Pentagon and the Art of War," talking with National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" host Bob Edwards about Soviet military strength.

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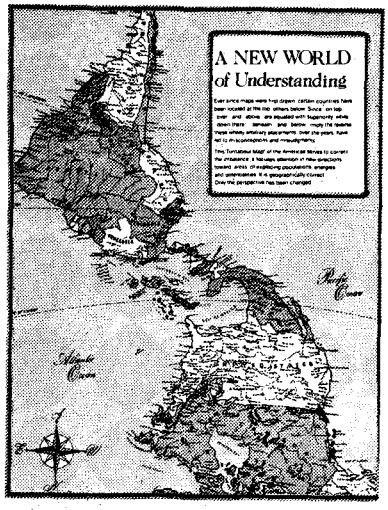

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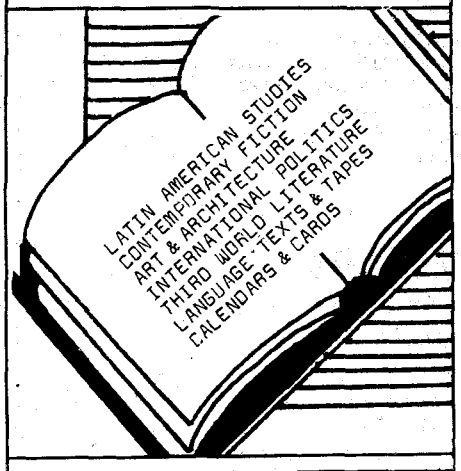

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here is a poet who can write that he is still free:

> . . . Yes, everything gets more
> restricted, less free.
> Yet I am free, one of the lucky ones . . .
> ("A Few Days")

Lucky for us, as well. Because in 1985 James Schuyler remains for poets and everybody else an unbowed reminder of what it means for the language to continue free, and of what a high calling poetry really is. □

One Culture

SUE M. HALPERN

THE FLAMINGO'S SMILE: Reflections in Natural History. *By Stephen Jay Gould. Norton. 476 pp. $17.95.*

Even before Sir Charles P. Snow delivered his 1959 Rede Lecture at Cambridge University, "The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution," scientists and humanists were cast as adversaries. The biologist Thomas Henry Huxley and his critic, another Rede Lecturer, Matthew Arnold, had surveyed the same territory nearly a century before. Arnold's 1882 Rede Lecture, "Literature and Science," which defended the virtues of a classical, nonscientific education, was written in reply to "Science and Culture," a paper presented by Huxley the previous year.

Paradoxically, by choosing sides, all participants in this debate agree on a first principle: the natural sciences and the humanities are disjunctive. As any of the disputants would point out, the two employ different methods of analysis, seek discrete kinds of knowledge and are expressed in alien languages. Science is typically inductive. The scientific method represents an attempt to derive generalizations from the predictable recurrence of natural phenomena as expressed in symbolic language. The humanities, in contrast, take as their object of study the human condition, attempting to comprehend and communicate it through the sui generis creations of mankind—the poetry of Milton or the canvases of Rembrandt, for instance.

Drawing the line so sharply, however, has led to the supposition that all practitioners of science fall on one side of the cultural divide and all students of the humanities on the other. Applying Karl Popper's counterinductive logic of scientific verification, which states that a theory holds until it can be disproved, one need only invoke the name of Stephen Jay Gould to expose the fallacy of that assumption. *The Flamingo's Smile*, Gould's fourth collection of essays, demonstrates with wit, erudition and panache that science and humanism are not mutually exclusive. In this book Gould welds the discoveries of science, the metaphors of literature, the lore of baseball, the lyrics of Gilbert and Sullivan and the legacies of history into solid commentary on issues and ideas of current and enduring importance.

Gould, who teaches geology, biology and the history of science at Harvard University, is a paleontologist. For more than a decade, he and David Woodruff, a biologist at the University of California, San Diego, have been tracking a small Bahamian land snail, *Cerion*, whose hundreds of distinct forms may eventually reveal how the diverse shapes of individuals' growth generate evolutionary change. Recalling his reaction when one of his and Woodruff's hypotheses about *Cerion* was borne out by the evidence they had found in the field, Gould writes:

> I wanted to shout for joy. Then I thought, "But who can I tell; who cares?" And I answered myself, "I don't have to tell anyone. We have just seen and understood something that no one has ever seen and understood before. What more does a man need?"

But Gould does tell others. In "Opus 100" he conveys with humor and awe the frustrations and rewards of scientific research. And, although this is the sole essay among thirty in which he directly discusses his fieldwork (and then apologetically, as if he was being rude or self-indulgent), it exemplifies how Gould is both a scientist and a humanist, not merely a scientist whose literary abilities enable him to build a narrow-gauge bridge between the two cultures in order to export the intellectual commodities of science to the other side. It portrays universal strivings, it

Sue M. Halpern is working on a book about the study of politics as science, to be published by Oxford University Press.

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expresses creativity and it reveals Gould to be a student of human nature as well as one of human affairs.

The subtitle of *The Flamingo's Smile* is *Reflections in Natural History*. This is both a pun on the original forum for these essays (in *Natural History* magazine, where Gould writes a monthly column) and a declaration of the author's humanistic aims. Gould employs the term "natural history" curiously. While his book consistently details the properties of the natural world, such as the idiosyncratic feeding mechanism of the flamingo or the genetic components of corn, his conception of natural history is "what it means to say that life is the product of a contingent past, not the inevitable and predictable result of simple, timeless laws of nature."

Above all else, Gould is concerned with meaning; in each of the essays he attempts to extract significance from neutral particulars to make a more general point. The essay "Of Wasps and WASPs," about Alfred C. Kinsey, the human sexuality researcher who began his career as an entomologist, is used as an opportunity to discuss the value of antiessentialist thinking—the acceptance of variation, change and continuity, and the rejection of "objective" criteria of value. "SETI and the Wisdom of Casey Stengel," in which Gould discusses the possibility of extraterrestrial intelligence, draws on the manager's sagacity to warn against the dangers of arguing from the specific to the general.

Implicit in Gould's writing is a binding premise: while the findings of science are themselves value-free, the uses to which they are put are not. For Gould, the patterns of the natural world are metaphorical and allegorical and can be used to promote human values like tolerance, truthfulness and impartiality. They can even be spurs to social and political action. For example, in "Sex, Drugs, Disasters and the Extinction of Dinosaurs," Gould relates how the asteroid-impact theory of dinosaur extinction was crucial to the development of the theory of nuclear winter proposed by Carl Sagan and other peace advocates. He notes that

> avoidance of nuclear war is fundamentally an ethical and political imperative, but we must know the factual consequences to make firm judgments. . . . A recognition of the very phenomenon that made our

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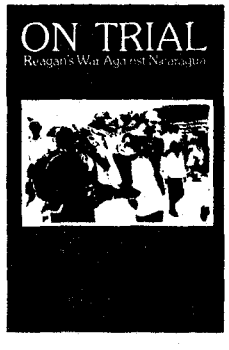

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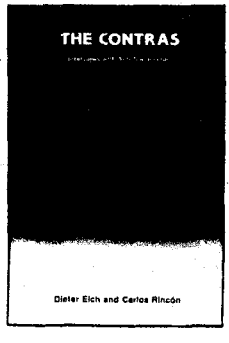

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evolution possible by exterminating the previously dominant dinosaurs and clearing a way for the evolution of large mammals, including us, might actually help to save us from joining those magnificent beasts in contorted poses among the strata of the earth.

Gould dispatches the myth of the disengaged scientist. He writes with conviction about evolutionary biology because of his commitment to the continuity of life. He is enamored of the scientific process and amused by human foibles, and he shows how in tandem the two have proved tendentious: spurious science and biological determinism have often been used to justify racial and other forms of prejudice. He cites numerous cases, among them the government of Singapore's recent sanctioning of eugenic dating services and the U.S. Supreme Court's 1927 decision in *Buck v. Bell* upholding compulsory sterilization for the mentally retarded.

But Gould's most original attack on racism, written in August 1984, is contained in an essay about the evolutionary fortunes of mankind. At the time, Gould was in Pretoria lecturing on the history of racism and was struck by the irony of being "a visitor in the nation most committed to myths of inequality—yet [whose] savannas . . . staged an evolutionary story of opposite import." "Human Equality Is a Contingent Fact of History" elucidates Gould's concept of natural history. In it, he systematically shows that genetic research has uncovered very little variation between the races; there is no evidence of a human "race gene." On this basis Gould argues that human equality is a biological fact, incontrovertible not because it is ethically acceptable but because it happens to be true. He underscores his reasoning by pointing out that other possible evolutionary scenarios, such as the survival of a subhuman species of markedly inferior intelligence, might have produced a different outcome.

The moral of this essay, that truth cannot be predetermined, is also the ethic of science. In the words of another great scientist and humanist, Jacob Bronowski, "Truth is the drive at the center of science; it must have the habit of truth, not as a dogma but as a process."

As a scientist, Stephen Jay Gould wears the habit of truth; he shows us that facts are the predicate of knowledge. As a humanist, he reminds us that truth is not reducible to fact. By his synthesis of science and humanism in *The Flamingo's Smile* and in earlier works, Gould illuminates the integrity of the natural world. □

The Comptian Groove

CASEY BLAKE

HERBERT CROLY OF THE NEW REPUBLIC. *By David W. Levy. Princeton University Press. 335 pp. $32.50.*

RALPH INGERSOLL: A Biography. *By Roy Hoopes. Atheneum. 441 pp. $19.95.*

Christened into Auguste Comte's religion of humanity as an infant, Herbert Croly remained committed throughout his life to the positivist ideal of a new scientific priesthood dedicated to the common good. Though timid to the point of inarticulateness in person, Croly sought out political leaders and tried to convince them of the need for a strong nation-state and forceful executive leadership as the foundations of a regenerated American community. Whether it was Theodore Roosevelt, whom Croly considered "a Thor wielding with power and effect a sledge-hammer in the cause of national righteousness," or Woodrow Wilson, whose war effort he championed in print, Croly revered powerful men of action. *The Promise of American Life*, the 1909 manifesto that launched Croly's career as a Progressive political theorist, became identified in the public mind with Roosevelt's new nationalism, once Croly's Thor borrowed its ideas for campaign speeches in 1912. Two years later, Croly joined Walter Lippmann and Walter Weyl in founding *The New Republic*, which quickly gained an international audience which read it for behind-the-scenes information about the Wilson Administration. Croly told Col. Edward M. House, Wilson's closest adviser, that the greatest event of his own life came on January 22, 1917, when the President echoed Croly's *T.N.R.* editorials in a speech before the Senate on American aims for a peace settlement to the Great War. The war, Croly had argued from the start, would "prove in the end an actual help to the 'New Republic,'" since the mobilization it required would disrupt "conventional ways of looking at things." With the world engaged in total war, the time was ripe for Progressive priests to win over the powerful to a new vision of American politics.

Historians and textbook editors later interpreted that vision as the application of Hamiltonian means to further Jeffersonian ends. But Crolyan liberalism was never that simple, despite the brilliant but facile invocation of those two political currents in *The Promise of American Life*. Thanks to David W. Levy's biography, it is now clear that it was Comte who was the central inspiration for Croly's Progressivism. Moreover, it was David Croly, the New York City journalist who filled his trade paper, *The Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, with positivist prescriptions for political reform, who literally baptized his son Herbert in the Comtian church and left him a lifelong believer in its creed. Levy's eminently traditional biography is the first of this central Progressive intellectual and the most sustained analysis of his thought since Charles Forcey's 1961 study, *The Crossroads of Liberalism*. The book's title is misleading. Levy's real story is not that of the early *New Republic*—which has been told before, and with more insight, by Forcey, Christopher Lasch and others—but of Croly's rethinking of American political theory. If Levy is unwilling to criticize the elitist and undemocratic tendencies of his subject's Progressivism, his book nevertheless offers critical information about Croly's role in the rise of modern liberalism and the demise of this country's democratic dogma.

Levy is at his best in describing the lessons young Herbert learned from David Croly. First and most important, Croly inherited his father's positivist faith in the immutability of laws of social development, which Comte had likened to forces of nature. It was these laws that drove society from the "metaphysical" to the "positive" stage in the nineteenth century; with that transition came the factory system, the industrial

Casey Blake is a professor of history at Reed College.

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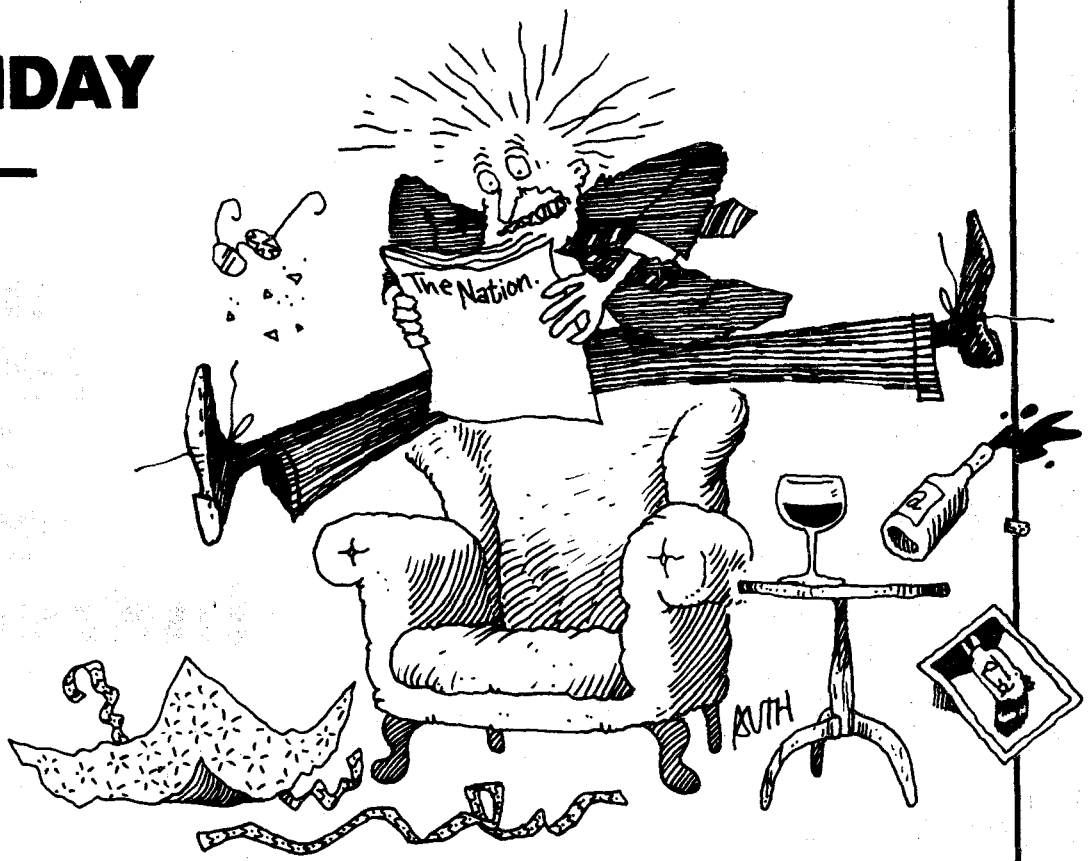

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division of labor and the modern corporation. Comte weaned nineteenth-century conservatives of their nostalgia for the *ancien régime* by showing how large-scale organization and industrial specialization could provide the basis for a new social discipline, free of the "anarchy" of revolutionary democracies. Just as doctors sought to understand laws of human development in order to assist their patients' maturation from childhood to adulthood, the new priests of positivism would uncover the laws underlying social evolution. It followed that social theory was less a critical exercise—since it would prove impossible to halt "progress"—than an effort to clear away the rubbish of archaic forms of civilization.

In *The Promise of American Life*, Croly applied this positivist theory to the great "social problem" of his (and our) day: the impact of the corporation on American democracy. Not surprisingly, he had only contempt for the antitrust movement. "Like Comte and like his father," Levy writes, "Croly recognized the modern industrial corporation as the necessary, irreversible culmination of everything that had come before." The "social problem" was not one of economic inequality or power relations but of the potential for conflict in a polity that had not learned to accept the corporate organization of industry. Croly's solution to this crisis, with its threat of "irresponsible local radicalism," was to argue for Federal regulation of trusts, collective bargaining with "good" (i.e., nonradical) unions and the introduction of industrial efficiency into government. Not only had corporations become indispensable to the economy but they had perfected the very form of administrative expertise that Croly hoped to bring to bear on the entire public realm. Both *T.N.R.* and the New School for Social Research, which Croly also had a hand in starting, were to be the planning organs of the new reformism, providing the theory for Progressive politics. As Jeffrey Lustig and other historians critical of such "corporate liberalism" have pointed out, Crolyan Progressivism looked to the technocratic state, not the virtuous republic, for the fulfillment of America's democratic promise.

In this vein, Croly tried to dissuade his fellow citizens from their dearest assumptions about politics. In particular, he ridiculed their neo-Jeffersonian belief in limited government as "a seductive example of triumphant intellectual dishonesty, and of the sacrifice of theory to practice, whenever such sacrifice was convenient." Like many of his contemporaries, Croly abhorred the glaring hypocrisy of turn-of-the-century politics. The gap between the ideal and reality of republicanism grew wider as the rise of corporations, class conflict and political machines called into question the Fourth of July pieties of mainstream political culture. But while radicals like Henry George and Eugene Debs argued that the threat posed by industrial capitalist conditions to a democratic civic life could only be met by renewing the participatory potential of republicanism, Croly—who often identified himself as a socialist—thought the time had come to scrap that tradition altogether. The republican overthrow of feudal authority had nothing to offer industrial America but its original promise of economic growth, civil liberties and moral improvement. "The American of to-day," Croly argued, "must be prepared to sacrifice to that traditional vision even the traditional American ways of realizing it." Though Croly's other major book, *Progressive Democracy*, of 1914, tempered the authoritarian implications of *The Promise of American Life*, his original hostility to republicanism and his insistence on corporate specialization remained his chief legacies to modern liberals.

Levy is reluctant to admit it, but such assumptions of irreversible progress, and of the primacy of positivist theory in reform politics, had crucial implications for Croly's conduct as a public intellectual. His passion for strong leadership led to behavior that bordered on obvious sycophancy. The glowing authorized biography of Marcus Hanna he wrote in 1911 and his offer to Colonel House five years later that *T.N.R.*'s foreign correspondents collect secret information for the White House suggest an almost craven submissiveness before political authority. Croly never followed Lippmann into full-time government service, but his belief that positivist ideas must conform to laws of social reality ended in his volunteering to put his skills as a writer and thinker to the uses of power. Croly only grudgingly settled on "The New Republic" as the name of his magazine (actually "The Nation" was his first choice, but it was taken), fearing that it sounded too "utopian." *T.N.R.* readers were quickly disabused of that possibility, however, as Croly's editorials hammered away at "utopianism" and "passivism" among antiwar leftists and promoted "masculine" virtues of vigor and power in government policy. Unfortunately, Levy never plumbs the psychological roots of Croly's position, which resemble the fears of self-disintegration and "feminine" weakness that cultural historians have uncovered in the Progressive male psyche.

More attention to Croly's psychological makeup also might have illuminated the mystical, organicist element in his writing, a side of Croly's work that Levy seems to downplay deliberately. Like many other Progressives, Croly argued for a new, social conception of individualism to replace the rugged individualism of the pioneer era. Where he differed from his contemporaries was in his belief that technocratic reform would usher in a new "religion of human brotherhood." Croly's spiritual side had always coexisted uneasily with his statism, but the shattering of his hopes for international progressivism after Versailles forced him to confront the contradiction at the heart of his work. In *The Breach in Civilization*, the 1920 book that he withdrew from publication at the last moment, he made his strongest case for a religiously grounded communitarian society. Croly now saw that his hopes for resurrecting "the social ideal of Catholicism" ran directly counter to his earlier agenda for positivist reform. The very Progressivism he had played such a pivotal role in promoting Croly now condemned for relying "uncritically on the state as the conscious agency of individual and social liberation. It failed to understand that in falling back upon the existing moral anarchy, it was playing into the hands of the enemies of liberalism." It took real courage to admit that the central tenets of his work had been flawed from the start. It took more courage than Croly had, however, to publish the book in spite of friends' criticisms. He turned instead to a purely personal quest for moral regeneration. Along with Hart Crane, Jean Toomer, Waldo Frank and other writers of the 1920s, Croly became a follower of the mystics G.I. Gurdjieff and A.R. Orage. The reformist thinker who had once looked to bold executive leadership as the means to American spiritual renewal spent much of the decade before his death in 1930 absorbed in mystical reverie and self-contemplation. The ful-

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fillment of the American promise apparently required more than a Presidential Thor wielding a Federal sledgehammer.

Croly's mysticism clearly makes his biographer somewhat uncomfortable. The 1920s, for Levy, were an "aberration—a strange interlude" in an otherwise liberal century. Levy sees the New Deal as the vindication of Crolyan Progressivism but doubts that Croly himself would have found F.D.R.'s welfare state a means of creating "truly regenerated and emancipated human beings." If only Croly's tough self-criticism late in life had informed Levy's own questions about his subject's politics. Unfortunately, what Levy has borrowed from Croly is the all-too-proper air of gentlemanly detachment that he pioneered in *T.N.R.* editorials. In general, Levy avoids subjecting Croly's Comtian vision to rigorous critique, as if such a task were beyond the realm of biography. One would never know from Levy's book that historians and political theorists have taken Progressivism as the starting point for a wide-ranging reevaluation of modern liberalism. Their rich and contentious debate finds no echo in Levy's pages.

Roy Hoopes also seems to have been influenced by the writing style of his subject. In his biography of the late Ralph Ingersoll, the journalistic boy wonder whose career culminated in the publication of New York's left-liberal daily *PM* in the 1940s, Hoopes adopts the breezy, enthusiastic tone that Ingersoll picked up while working at Time Inc. Hoopes's biography will make fascinating reading for those who can't get their fill of insider's gossip about the world of New York publishing, but it will disappoint anyone interested in assessing Ingersoll's experiment in left journalism. Despite Hoopes's best intentions, Ingersoll emerges from the biography as a decidedly apolitical figure, whose ideas, such as they were, consisted of vague generalities and the fashionable parlance of posh Popular Frontism. If this biography inspires another Hollywood epic about a left-wing journalist, the result will probably look a lot less like *Reds* than like *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.*

Ingersoll's professional life was certainly the stuff of screenplays. Beginning with his position as a managing editor at *The New Yorker*, Ingersoll had a pivotal role in more than his fair share of magazine successes. After leaving

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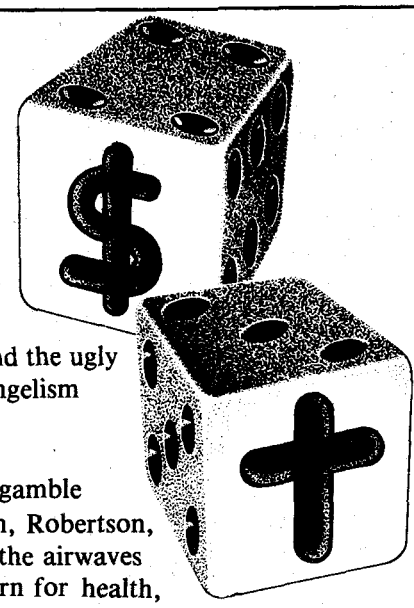

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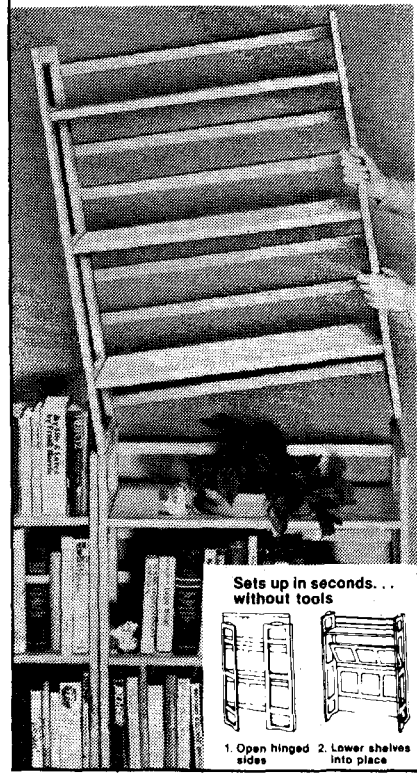

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that publication in 1929, he went to Time Inc., where he successively helped edit *Fortune* at a time when it had the likes of Dwight Macdonald, James Agee and Archibald MacLeish on its staff, proved a major force behind the launching of *Life* in 1936 and became general manager of Henry Luce's empire, taking special responsibility for making money from *Time* to finance *Life*. Before he left the organization in 1939, Ingersoll developed a love-hate relationship with Luce, which was hardly improved by Ingersoll's decision to alter Luce's rather flattering cover portrait of Adolph Hitler as *Time*'s "Man of the Year" for 1938. Ingersoll took a leave of absence soon after to develop "a new form of newspaper"—which appeared in 1940 as *PM*.

PM has since achieved an almost legendary status among journalists, especially those on the left. Fondly remembered excerpts from Ingersoll's prospectus for the paper provide one explanation. "We are against people who push other people around," he wrote. "We are against fraud and deceit and greed and cruelty and we will seek to expose their practitioners. We are for people who are kindly and courageous and honest. . . . We are American and we prefer democracy to any other form of government." Another reason for *PM* 's many admirers was Ingersoll's refusal to accept advertising, which he thought would compromise the paper's integrity. In its place, *PM* published an advertising digest summarizing sales and bargains in New York City, while its consumer reports anticipated by almost thirty years similar features in other papers. Then there were *PM* 's writers, who included, at various times, Max Lerner, I.F. Stone, James Wechsler, Leo Huberman, Dashiell Hammett and other major liberal and leftist journalists. Ingersoll gave the paper a bold, modern look by using innovative graphics, a good many photographs and *Time*-style departments to organize the day's news. Finally, *PM* stands out in retrospect as one of the rare moments when a left-of-center publication actually reached a relatively large audience in a major American city. The newspaper's fans and detractors both point to *PM* as an icon of New York's left-liberal community before the onslaught of the cold war.

Even before its first issue, *PM* was the object of rumors that Ingersoll was publishing a newspaper dominated by Communists. And internal struggles between Communist-allied and anti-Communist writers poisoned the atmosphere at the paper throughout its history. Those conflicts grew more serious between 1942 and 1945, the years in which Ingersoll enlisted in the Army and, among other things, played a key role in planning the invasion of Normandy on D-day. After the paper folded in 1949, critics were quick to blame Communist manipulation of *PM* for its demise.

Though *PM* published work by Communist and fellow-traveling writers and artists, the charge that the paper was an unofficial C.P. organ was false. Ingersoll may have briefly belonged to a Communist study group in 1938, but he generally kept his distance from the party. His paper was the first major urban daily to back F.D.R.'s foreign policy in 1940 and 1941, before Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union rudely disrupted the Nazi-Soviet pact. And Ingersoll had many skirmishes with the paper's pro-Communist faction and with Communists in the Newspaper Guild. In the end, though, it was *PM* 's finances, and not political squabbling on the left, that brought the paper down. *PM* always lost money, prompting Marshall Field, its main financier, to demand in 1946 that it accept advertising. Ingersoll quit in protest. Even with advertisements, the paper failed to attract enough readers, and it lumbered along unsuccessfully before folding three years later.

What those who revere the memory of Ingersoll's experiment and those who continue to denounce its leftism fail to realize is that the politics of *PM* were muddled at best. Aside from the stirring words quoted above, Ingersoll's memos about the paper's direction were fairly dreary, technical affairs, spiced up by an occasional upbeat reference to the New Deal as a winning combination of the best of socialism and capitalism. What most shaped Ingersoll's politics was a touching faith in science and centralized planning that would have embarrassed even the young Herbert Croly. In preparation for the paper, Ingersoll envisioned a staff made up of "an expensive, highly trained and talented group of experts." He summed up his attitude toward an expanded role for government this way: "We would be for it where it conducted an experiment with enough efficiency not to endanger the scientific result; we would be against its reactionary aspects." Ingersoll hoped to infuse his paper with "the atmosphere of first pure, and then applied, science." The difference between *PM* and the average daily would be as great as "the service of scientific truth in a dusty 1890 laboratory and in the knowingly equipped laboratories of Cal Tech in 1938." Here was the language of the Comtian bargain with bigness and "progress," shorn of Croly's ennobling words about human brotherhood and updated to the breathless prose of twentieth-century mass culture.

Ingersoll's entire political stance, with its emphasis on "scientific" style over substance, now seems conspicuously dated. So does his glamorous image as a playboy progressive, meeting with F.D.R. and Fiorello LaGuardia, charting war strategy with the Allied High Command and delivering the news about the centrally planned welfare state to the masses in articles written by "experts" in a journalistic "laboratory." The nostalgia that surrounds the memory of *PM* in some quarters may very well be appropriate. Nostalgia usually attaches itself to those aspects of the past that have lost any power or meaning. We can only hope that the "progressivism" of war planning, the centralized state and scientific cant is one such example, at least as far as the left is concerned. The promise of American life still demands criticism of ossified political traditions, especially when those traditions are disguised as progress. □

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THE ZERO-SUM SOLUTION: Building a World-Class American Economy. *By Lester C. Thurow. Simon & Schuster. 414 pp. $18.95.*

They have a new version of Trivial Pursuit now, just for economists—it has 3,000 answers for 100 questions.
—President Reagan

As an economist, I wince at economist-bashers. But having spent the past decade outside the profession, as a journalist and political adviser, I can understand the impulse. Armed with mathematics, computer programs and data, economists seem unable to do with any certainty what the public expects of science: predict. Will we have a recession this year? Are interest rates going up or down? How many of us will be unemployed at year's end? Will a tax cut make for a healthier economy?

Politicians, journalists and the lay public who look to economists for answers get precisely that—answers, but in a cacophony of voices. To nonprofessional detractors, economists insist that their formulas are not flawed; it's just that the real world is difficult to model, and changing policies and circumstances introduce uncertainties that the models cannot account for.

Economics is thus a great deal like meteorology, able to give a reasonable short-term estimate for a very defined region about whether it will rain or shine, with the promise that someday, with better models, more computers and more refinements, the forecasts will be better. When the issue is whether or not to take an umbrella, the consequences of error can be annoying but not fatal. When the issue is the future of the American—indeed, the world—economy, fatality moves to center stage.

For the past decade or so, Americans have been tasting the consequences of errors in economic prediction. Basic industries—steel, automobile, textile, construction—are all on life-support systems. Two years ago we passed out of the worst recession since the 1930s but we have not come very far since. The number of poor has increased by 7 million in five years. There are up to 3 million people living on American streets. The level of international debt is staggering, the national debt has doubled since 1980 and a new recession lurks just ahead.

With hurricanes on the horizon, umbrellas are not going to help. But what is?

For the past five years, the Reagan Administration has preached a redemptive, fundamentalist gospel which can be summarized in one word: Rambo. America has grown soft, and the Republicans are here to reverse that course. We save too little, we work too little, we invest too little and we complain too much. The Japanese and other foreign competitors are whipping the tails off us and we deserve it because the Democrats have tricked us into a something-for-nothing heresy that, in our hearts, we always knew was wrong. Let Reagan be Reagan, let business be entrepreneurial, kick ass on the assembly line, and this country—if the Democrats and their quasi-socialist friends can be held at bay—might just turn around and get back to being number one.

Fundamentalism is nothing new to America, and quite a few voices have been alerting us to the dangers of quick salvation and to the fact that Reagan policies have borne little relation to Reagan reality. Even *The Economist*, a loyal fan of both Margaret Thatcher and Reagan, described his first Administration as an "era of turbo-charged Keynesianism" and pointed to the crucial role of massive Federal deficits rather than supply-side initiatives or monetarist tinkering in whatever can be taken as Reagan's economic achievements to date. Such deficits, as everyone knows, can't be sustained forever.

But where have the Democrats been? Here is the party that produced the only four-term Presidency in U.S. history, the party that not only introduced Keynesianism to economic management but built a comprehensive network of social programs that dealt—however incompletely—with American capitalism's inability to solve the problems of poverty, unemployment, hunger and inadequate housing in the world's most affluent society. If they have some sort of answer to Rambo economics, where the hell is it?

Richard Parker is an economist.

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The search for an answer has become something of a mini-industry on the edges of the Democratic Party. Gar Alperovitz, Barry Bluestone, Samuel Bowles, James Fallows, Jeff Faux, David Gordon, Bennett Harrison, Robert Kuttner, Joseph Pechman, Robert Reich, Stanley Scheinbaum, Derek Shearer, Thomas Weisskopf—a baker's dozen, alphabetically arranged, come to mind, all of whom have weighed in with detailed and intelligent alternatives. This past year, while the party was anxiously searching for ideas to stem the Reagan tide, many of these writers on economics were brought before the Presidential candidates in private meetings meant to transfer their policy recommendations into campaign issues. They spoke; the candidates listened; in some cases they were heard; and Ronald Reagan won in a landslide.

So where do we go from here?

Enter Lester C. Thurow. Thurow is a professor of economics and management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Schooled at Williams College, Oxford and Harvard University, the author of ten books, a former staff member of the Council of Economic Advisers and for several years a columnist for *Newsweek*, Thurow has made a professional life out of the bridge between academic economics and the applied science of Washington-based policy. Measured against most of his colleagues, he has done a remarkable job of avoiding specialization and has chosen a point of view that offers progressive Democrats and their nonparty allies a lightning rod by which to measure their own views and achievements.

In *The Zero-Sum Solution*, Thurow tries to come up with something the Democrats have yet to assemble: a set of policies that could lead us back to national prosperity under a liberal/progressive aegis. Neither weak-kneed nor weak-spined, Thurow has put forth one of the most intelligent reviews of the problems we face as well as an array of intelligent answers that—in today's constricted political environment—just might, if well-executed, work us out of the box in which we find ourselves.

Thurow's fundamental thesis—which is bound to discomfort some—borrows an essential element from the Republican-dominated debate of the 1970s. It is no longer enough to look at America's political and economic problems; we

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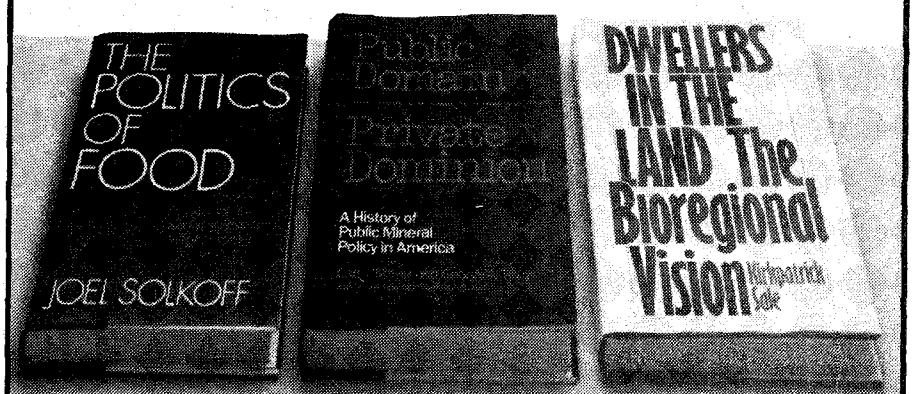
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must realize that we are now, as never before, only one (albeit the biggest) player on a global chessboard.

The Japanese are better savers; the Germans are more productive; Southeast Asian manufacturers produce goods of equal or better quality than we do. Our trade deficit is explained not so much by overvaluation of the dollar as by the fact that we are no longer competitive in a market arena that now measures the circumference of the globe. So, bottom line, the game has changed because the borders have changed—and with it the rules. Thurow's analysis is embedded in the book's subtitle: *Building a World-Class American Economy.*

In the first third of his book, Thurow constructs a persuasive case for our failure. Productivity is the key, and at that we have been dogs. He presents a series of supposed answers to the immediate problem and proceeds to knock them off, one by one. He summarizes boldly:

> To do nothing about America's lack of productivity growth is to accept a standard of living that gradually falls relative to the world's industrial leaders. . . . To do nothing is to lose not only economic leadership but political and military leadership too, for no nation can build or maintain world leadership with a rotting economy.

This is heady stuff, and frightening. Essentially it says that the world is new, the terms different and all of us must adapt. Most important, the alternatives are stark: "The United States has always thought of itself as a middle-class country," Thurow warns. "Yet under the pressure of economic decline, the American middle class is becoming an endangered species."

Since most of us aspire to or wish to remain in the middle class, Thurow has our attention. He proposes a series of solutions that can be summarized in three parts. First, we need to borrow from the Japanese (and others) the concept of teamwork—of business, labor and government working in concert to rebuild America; second, we need to improve the quality of the work force by investing heavily in pre-work education and on-the-job training to build "a high-quality workforce"; third, we need industrial policies.

I must tell you that in watching Thurow unfold his holy trinity of economic policy goals, I have nothing but admiration for his shrewdness, but that is also the point at which my objectivity as a reviewer collapses. We are already at the tail end of what Henry Luce pronounced the American Century. Because we have gone about rebuilding Allied friends and Axis foes into a grand anti-Communist alliance since the war, we now confront a world we can no longer dominate. We have exhausted a great deal of our political, economic and moral capital in enticing the world to see itself in a peculiarly narrow and (from an American vantage point) self-interested way. Having adopted this view, America has been rejected by the rest of the world.

In the past thirty years, we have helped generate economies in Singapore that are stronger than those in Syracuse; industries in Hong Kong more adaptive than those in Houston. Now we are paying the price. Jobs are shifting to low-wage countries, where capital can be invested with greater returns. Nothing short of reducing the wages of most American workers to below those of the teen-agers who work at McDonald's is going to change that. If we pursue the Republican policies of Rambo economics, that is certainly where we are headed. And if the Democrats—including wise, adaptive men and women like Lester Thurow—fail to break decisively with the drift toward Ramboism within their own party, they risk aiding and abetting the crime of reducing millions of Americans to the status of paupers.

That is the real challenge facing the Democratic Party—and those of us who would hope to do more than comment on the moral, economic and political decline of our country. Thurow, if you read him carefully, is someone whose thinking is in transition. By focusing on productivity, he is making obeisance to the Republican domination of our intellectual climate; by proposing cooperation among business, labor and government, he is, in his own way, offering up something akin to the reality of the New Deal, if not its promise; by focusing on industrial policies, I think he is asking you and me to step forward and demand of government a more cogent and ultimately more coherent step toward the next century, when we (freed of fundamentalism, which always rises and then passes in America) will be free to debate how it is that we want America to compete in the world.

But that, by itself, won't free us from our immediate dilemma, which is not about America versus the world but America versus itself. Despite all the toughness on the Republican side (which is to be expected) and the Democratic response (which is gutless), America is not going to resolve its internal issues in the way Lester Thurow is proposing. And that goes to the core of what it is to be more than just a

AFTER A VISIT

"The surest way to the center is through a maze,"
The guide was saying. A thread snapped, so.
Its pain outlasts the calm receding daze.

Foreplay, partita, the faint slurred phrase
From the deathbed, each a lucid vertigo . . .
The surest way to the center is through a maze.

Itself the object of its search, the soul strays
Homeward, daunted by all it used to know.
Its pain casts out a calm receding daze.

Reason's monster—bull-headed, overpraised—
Lifts himself up from the blood in the throat.
The surest way to a center is through that maze.

Can you remember the spiraling scar I raised
Before you flinched, and not wanting to let go
Its pain? Out past the calm receding days

Since, I've learned to love in random ways
You predicted then. They all answer now, though
The surest way to the center is still a maze
Where pain outlasts the calm receding daze.

J.D. McClatchy

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Democrat in the last quarter of the twentieth century. America's dilemma is not simply a matter of economic policies but of what we are about as a nation. Thurow's book is only a transitional effort in addressing this problem.

It is incomplete because it is a book about economic policy, and economic policy is a set of guidelines crafted, finally, by the political process, under pressure from groups and issues of widely divergent power and appeal. If there is a moral content to economic policy for Democrats, it is threefold in its demands: the economic suffering of the bottom quarter of the population must be ended; the security of a broad middle class must be stabilized rather than subjected to the wild swings of the business cycle; monopolistic economic power—which has been increasing, not decreasing—must be frontally assaulted and broken. That is the economic face of the moral agenda.

Those economic goals are beyond reach because we lack a political vision or leadership that would inspire voters to trust the Democrats to achieve the policies which Thurow and others would have us follow. Thurow can't be blamed for that lack of vision, yet his dilemma—good ideas all dressed up but with no place to go—emphasizes the fracturing of political life that has led to this cul-de-sac.

In an era of specialization, economists must practice their craft by producing ideas on how to administer a complex society. Although that complex society claims to be governed by democratic values—including the understanding and assent of the governed—the very complexity of such ideas makes them remote and incomprehensible to the majority of voters.

It is the responsibility of those like Thurow who write about political acts to make their ideas both comprehensible and inspiring in order to evoke in people a sense of society's purpose. Unfortunately, productivity analysis, trade policy and industrial restructuring are not the stuff of neighborhood or grassroots debate. If cast in terms of liberty, equality and justice, of independence and integrity, such policies can be made not only understandable but inspiring, because such language is deeply embedded in American culture.

Until the Democrats and their progressive allies can recapture this kind of political language, they will languish in the shadow of the Republicans. The

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lesson of the Reagan Presidency—repeated daily for us—is that policy goals are nothing without political language that is clear, succinct and familiar to a majority of the voters. We may disagree with this President's goals, we may find him hypocritical or worse, but he has brilliantly reasserted the right of political language to claim the allegiance of a democratic nation.

Lester Thurow has written a powerful, intelligent and detailed book, which will appeal to several wings of the Democratic elite. But that audience is an infinitesimal proportion of the voters Democrats will need to recapture political power sufficient to realize Thurow's—or anyone else's—policy goals. The book will be read by economists, Congressional staff members, party policy specialists and editorial writers. But until a new generation of political leaders finds a broad and believable political language that can inspire a majority to trust the Democrats and their allies with leadership of the nation, books like Thurow's will sit on shelves, honored but ignored.

Perhaps it is too much to ask that Thurow seek that broader language, but I think not. Men and women of intelligence, committed to a common and progressive view, owe each other—especially now—an effort at the widest view and the most inspired examination of our situation. We have masons and carpenters galore, capable of executing their part in building a new political home; what we lack are architects who will sketch—in ways we all can understand—the edifice we desperately need. □

Blunt Instruments

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

CUTTING EDGES: Making Sense of the Eighties. *By Charles Krauthammer. Random House. 221 pp. $17.95.*

I have never been able, except in my lazier moments, to employ the word "predictable" as a term of abuse. Nor has the expression "knee-jerk" ever struck me as a witty way of denigrating a set of strongly held convictions. The pseudoscientific word "Pavlovian" (which is often used by mistake to describe a nonconditioned reflex) is even less help. It is favored by the sort of sage who describes as "schizophrenic" someone who is of two minds about where to eat lunch. Such sages will also describe as "paranoid" or "conspiracy-theorist" anyone who believes that the C.I.A. hired the Mafia to kill Fidel Castro or that the F.B.I. sent notes to Martin Luther King Jr. urging him to commit suicide.

Speaking purely for myself, I should be alarmed if my knee failed to respond to certain stimuli. It would warn me of a loss of nerve. I have written in the past year about the MX missile, constructive engagement, the confirmation of Edwin Meese 3d and other *grand guignol* episodes. Naturally I hope that my arguments were original, but I would be depressed to think that anyone who knew me or my stuff could not easily have "predicted" the line I would take.

In the charmed circle of neoliberal and neoconservative journalism, however, "unpredictability" is the special emblem and certificate of self-congratulation. To be able to bray that "as a liberal, I say bomb the shit out of them" is to have achieved that eye-catching, versatile marketability that is so beloved of editors and talk-show hosts. As a lifelong socialist I say don't let's bomb the shit out of them. See what I mean? It lacks that sex appeal somehow. Predictable as hell.

Picture, then, if you will, the unusual difficulties faced by Charles Krauthammer, newest of the neocon mini-windbags. He has the arduous job, in an arduous time, of being an unpredictable conformist. He has the no less demanding task of making this pose appear original and, more, of making it appear courageous. At a time when the polity (as he might well choose to call it) is showing signs of Will-fatigue, it can't be easy to write an attack on the United Nations or Albania or Qaddafi *and* make it seem like a lone, fearless affirmation. An average week of reading *The Washington Post* Op-Ed page already exposes me to appearances from George Will, William F. Buckley Jr., Jeane Kirkpatrick, Norman Podhoretz, Emmett Tyrrell, Joe Kraft, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, and Stephen Rosenfeld. Clearly its editors felt that a radical new voice was needed when they turned to the blazing, impatient talents on offer in *The New Republic*—and selected Krauthammer. I dare say *Time* felt the same way when it followed suit. We live in a period when a chat show that includes Morton Kondracke considers that it has filled the liberal slot.

Of Krauthammer's book, with its right little, trite little title, George Will has already written that it comes from "the best new, young writer on public affairs. It is only a matter of time, and not much time, before the adjectives 'new' and 'young' will be put aside." I don't doubt it. There's certainly nothing new or young here. And it's only a matter of reading the book to make one realize that the other adjective will be not so much put aside as stuffed elsewhere.

In common with most but not all of his conservative columnist colleagues, Krauthammer does not write very well, reason very well or know very much about anything. In common with them, too, he holds the "unpredictable" view that the United States is far too modest and retiring as a world power. In common with them, finally, he thinks that it takes an exercise of moral strength to point this out.

Do I shrink from giving an example that encapsulates all these shortcomings? I do not so shrink. Here's a paragraph, recycled from a Krauthammer column in *The New Republic*:

> In the 1984 Democratic campaign, the principal disagreement over Central America was whether the United States should station twenty advisers in Honduras (Walter Mondale's position) or zero (Gary Hart's). On Angola, El Salvador, Grenada, Lebanon and Nicaragua, the Democratic position has involved some variety of disengagement: talks, aid, sanctions, diplomacy—first. In practice this invariably means—only. Force is ruled out, effectively if not explicitly.

Scrutinizing this clumsily written passage, one is struck by the following:

§ Charles Krauthammer used to work as a speechwriter for the ridiculous Mondale. Ordinarily, he underlines this bit of his résumé in order to show that he is a former bleeding heart, knows the score, has been an insider, has seen the light, has lost his faith and therefore found his reason—all the familiar or predictable panoply of the careerist defector.

§ To have known and worked for Mondale, and to have kept a reasonably attentive eye on the press during the 1984 election, is presumably to know that

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Mondale publicly called for a quarantine of Nicaragua. A quarantine is an armed blockade.

§ Ronald Reagan's military excursions to Beirut, Grenada, the Honduran border and elsewhere all received the sanctification of the House and Senate Democratic leadership. So that it might be said that nobody wanting to make a case for the Democrats as appeasement-sodden buffoons could have argued it in a more unlettered, sly and misleading manner.

Can it be that Krauthammer enjoys coveted space, and establishment affection, more because of this manner than in spite of it? The suspicion cannot be groundless. This man actually began a column, in 1985, by telling that antique story about Calvin Coolidge and Dorothy Parker as if he had minted it himself. He believes, or at any rate he writes, that "the death of Senator Henry Jackson has left an empty stillness at the center of American politics." That would be pardonable, if corny, in an obituary piece, but it introduces a rather unexciting reflection on the fate of cold war liberalism which omits to mention that Jackson's clones (Elliott Abrams, Richard Perle, Kirkpatrick and other of Krauthammer's favorites) are all over the place.

In a slim field, my nomination for the most memorable and emblematic quotation would go to his view that "the great moral dilemmas of American foreign policy arise when the pursuit of security and the pursuit of democracy clash. *Contra* aid is not such a case. That is Cruz's message. Is anyone listening?" That was in *The Washington Post*—this year. It contains everything that has made Krauthammer a figure. Cliché ("moral dilemma," "pursuit"). False antithesis ("security" versus "democracy"). Pomposity (Hubert Humphrey posing as Winston Churchill in the sonorous periods of the sentencing). Banality (Arturo Cruz original at this late date?). Last and as usual, the parroting of the Reaganite party line, written as if by a lonely, ignored dissident (*Listening?* They're fighting a war for him). This is affectation, poorly executed.

In this entire salad of emissions I could find no "cutting edges" and nothing that qualified as "against the stream" of the regnant orthodoxy. And, as a regular reader of Krauthammer, I can recall only two columns of his that I have admired. One was about the birth of his son Daniel. The other was about the absurdity and implausibility of the Star Wars project. Neither of those articles appears here—the first because it was too late to include and the second because it was Krauthammer's only moment of dissent and misgiving and, what with one thing and another, he would rather forget it. I think I could have predicted that. □

Heresies

MAUREEN QUILLIGAN

IMMODEST ACTS: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy. *By Judith C. Brown. Oxford University Press. 214 pp. $14.95.*

While researching an economic study of Medicean Florence, Judith C. Brown, associate professor of history at Stanford University, accidentally discovered the transcript of a religious inquest that took place between 1619 and 1623 in Pescia, Italy. The transcript includes, among other matters, detailed descriptions of a sexual relationship between two nuns. As the only extant European document concerning lesbian sexuality before 1700, it is invaluable, Brown argues, for analyzing "hitherto unexplored areas of women's sexual lives as well as Renaissance views of female sexuality." Using a diary, tax records and the usual municipal and church records, along with the transcript, *Immodest Acts* pieces together as intimate a life of a nonnoble woman in early seventeenth-century Italy as we are likely to get. The story of Benedetta Carlini, a Theatine abbess, is a fascinating illumination of premodern cultural concepts and, like the life of Arnaud du Tilh, recently retold by Natalie Zemon Davis in *The Return of Martin Guerre*, it is a story bound to remain something of an enigma to twentieth-century readers, with our own unavoidable post-Freudian biases.

The fact of the trial transcript's uniqueness is as revealing as anything within it. Save for four sketchily known cases in France, two in Germany, one in Switzerland and none, until now, in Italy, there were few publicly documented instances of lesbian relations in premodern Europe. (Hundreds of cases of male homosexuality were tried by ecclesiastical courts.) As Brown puts it, the "obliteration of a significant aspect of female sexuality from contemporary consciousness is all the more curious because at some level of knowledge, people were well aware that it existed." The cultural silence, the virtual neglect of the subject "in law, in theology, and literature suggests an almost active willingness to *dis*believe." This trembling in the face of the apparently unimaginable seems to have been literally played out by the scribe who copied down the testimony concerning sexual acts between Benedetta and her fellow nun Bartolomea Crivelli. Brown notes: "So disturbing was Bartolomea's testimony for the scribe who recorded it that he lost his usual composure. His handwriting, so neat and orderly up to now, grew illegible. His words, and even some of his phrases, had to be crossed out and rewritten." Brown concludes that "the officials who heard Bartolomea's story entirely lacked either an intellectual or an imaginative schema that would incorporate the kind of behavior she described."

While Brown is certainly right to stress the scribe's obvious confusion and distress, he and the other officials involved in the case had other points of reference that were fully functional in this case—including the theological categories of angel and demon. Indeed, it was only because these categories were engaged that the account of Benedetta's sexuality was recorded. Benedetta and Bartolomea were initially investigated not on charges of sexual sin but as part of a normal ecclesiastical study of certain claims Benedetta had made—claims to visions, to mystical communion with angels and to suffering the stigmata.

Brown is aware that those claims to supernatural experiences, made by a woman who became abbess of the Theatine convent in Pescia at an unusually young age, would have had

Maureen Quilligan is co-editor, with Margaret Ferguson, of the forthcoming Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe *(University of Chicago Press). She teaches at the University of Pennsylvania.*

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Central America
Appearing just after the controversial Kissinger report in January 1984, the special issue on Central America offered a strong refutation of the Administration's views. The arguments still hold. Highlighted by Walter LaFeber's overview, William LeoGrande's analysis of the domestic political fallout and Peter Davis's compelling firsthand report on the Nicaraguan revolution today, the issue is one of the most urgent, informative and important in *The Nation*'s history.

K.A.L. 007: What the U.S. Knew And When We Knew It
Published on the eve of the first anniversary of the downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007, this issue raises serious questions about the U.S. role in the tragedy. After a year of thorough research, author David Pearson concludes that U.S. authorities at the highest level knew the airliner was off course much earlier than they have admitted, and that the questions raised by the official versions of the story can only be resolved by a Congressional inquiry.

K.A.L. 007: Unanswered Questions
The August 17/24, 1985, issue brings our 1984 report up to date. With contributions by David Pearson, John Keppel and David Corn, it is the culmination of an intensive investigation. The authors analyze new Japanese radar data, discuss a Nation Institute–sponsored review, by aviation experts, of the final airline transmission and describe the government's efforts to obstruct investigation.

The Strange Correspondence of Morris Ernst & John Edgar Hoover, 1939–1964
Harrison E. Salisbury, the award-winning journalist, details how the director of the F.B.I. exploited and debased the confidence of a leading civil libertarian, and in so doing seriously compromised the A.C.L.U. Salisbury draws on some 300 exchanges to document the extent to which the machinations of the "top constable" profaned the democratic process.

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El Salvador
A compilation of *Nation* articles on Central America and El Salvador, including an early debunking of the famed "White Paper" by James Petras.

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What do Russians think about the nuclear arms race? Two prominent Marxist dissidents, historian Roy A. Medvedev and biologist Zhores A. Medvedev, provide the unofficial viewpoint with a clarity rarely found in the American press.

Disarmament: Covering the Unthinkable
In this special issue Richard Pollak takes a critical look at the media coverage of the indisputably most important issue facing mankind; Michael Kazin gives a brief history of the birth of the freeze movement; and David Corn presents a useful directory of organizations working on the disarmament issue.

Fifteen Years of the Burger Court
Herman Schwartz and his cadre of twelve leading lawyers and scholars put together an invaluable assessment of the Burger Court. Leaving no stone unturned, the authors scrutinize the last fifteen years of "intense judicial activism" in a thought-provoking manner. No lawyer, student of the courts or concerned citizen should be without this issue.

Empire as a Way of Life
William Appleman Williams' brilliant analysis of America's life with an empire—and the implications of life without one—was the focus of this special issue that was distributed to the delegates at the 1980 Democratic National Convention.

Myths of the Middle East
This special issue of *The Nation* is devoted to breaking the logomachy jam in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by subjecting the emotion-sodden rhetoric that weighs down current thinking to a blast of fresh ideas.

Many Bhopals: Technology Out of Control
Robert Engler reveals that the dangerous dependence on pesticides and the movement away from people-intensive agriculture results from corporate profit-making strategies. In addition, he shows that the Bhopal disaster is one of countless poisonings occurring each year, here and in the Third World, under an irresponsible scientific-corporate elite.

Beyond Westmoreland: The Right's Attack on the Press
How does the Westmoreland case fit into the New Right's strategy to curtail the independence of the press? Walter Schneir and Miriam Schneir answer this question and provide an overview of the New Right's campaign against the media.

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strong political ramifications. The group of women whom Benedetta had joined as a nun, as well as their male protectors, would have profited from her notoriety as a mystic because they were then attempting to gain official status as an enclosed convent, and they might therefore have welcomed her assertion of special authority. However gratifying such fame and power were for both the abbess and the abbey, they were disturbing to people at higher bureaucratic levels. Thus, it is not surprising that Benedetta was found to be a legitimate mystic during the investigation carried out by local clerics or that a second investigation made by the more skeptical emissaries of the papal nuncio reversed this decision and declared her a fraud, possessed by demons.

"But let us come to the deeds worked through Sister Benedetta by the said angels," the emissaries decreed, "so that they may clarify whether [the angels are] of Paradise or demons from Hell." And so, through "great shame," Bartolomea confessed to being forced into sexual relations. But as she explains it, her true partner was not Benedetta but Splenditello, the male angel who had inspired her mother superior. In the presentation and acceptance of that testimony, we see that both the investigating officials and the women themselves understood their sexual desire exclusively in religious terms. The nature of the women's sexual experience was important only insofar as it could prove Splenditello to be an angel or a demon. Had the nuns been found guilty of "sodomy," they would have been burned to death, but they were not. By the fortuitous survival of a private diary kept by a nun of the convent, Brown was able to discover that Benedetta died at age 71 after thirty-five years of imprisonment. She must have been punished not for a sexual crime but for her unsuccessful bid as a mystic for power over the convent and the town.

The uniqueness of Benedetta Carlini's case, so significant in itself, makes it dangerous to generalize from her story toward a larger history of female sexuality. But in Brown's brilliant and sensitive re-creation of the case, and especially in her deft placement of it within the larger sociopolitical context of Medicean Florence, we have a fascinating reconstruction of a piece of premodern life in its most intimate details and an invaluable work of history. □

Moralists and Esthetes

PHYLLIS ROSE

CARACOLE. *By Edmund White. E.P. Dutton. 342 pp. $17.95.*

Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* has been called the finest French novel written in English, but *Caracole* would be my nomination. Its epigraph from *The Charterhouse of Parma* suggests its literary ancestry. Like Fabrice del Dongo of *Charterhouse*, like Julien Sorel of *The Red and the Black*, Gabriel of *Caracole* is an innocent young man from the provinces who makes the move to the city that so fascinated nineteenth-century French novelists. No wonder. This narrative structure allows the author—along with his hero—to discover piece by relished piece the complexities and sophistications of a world by no means innocent. It worked for Stendhal and for Balzac, and it works for Edmund White. His hero learns about power and love and the ways in which they're connected. So do we. If you want to know about the dynamics of a small, closed social system and if Stendhal's Parma seems too remote, try White's portrait of an imaginary city, part Venice under the Austrians, part Paris and part New York of the intellectual coteries.

All literature looks in two directions, toward the world and back toward itself. It portrays the world (or gives the illusion of doing so) and creates a world of its own. More than most American writers, White is divided between these two impulses, old-fashioned realism and modernist artifice. His first novel, *Forgetting Elena*, was dazzlingly self-contained—a brilliant, original piece of fiction which created a world that never was. Well, perhaps there was a touch of Fire Island. But Fire Island with a prince, a court, a grand hotel where everyone gathers at night? It was White's distinctive accomplishment to produce the disquieting sense that you knew this world, these people, these feelings, despite their being placed in the middle of an uncompromisingly artificial narrative.

Nocturnes for the King of Naples, his second novel, detached itself even further from conventional plot and character development. As its title suggests, it is a series of lyric pieces, sometimes of breathtaking beauty. After that, White made the surprising move of writing a novel in a completely traditional form. *A Boy's Own Story*, a novel of growing up, is his most accessible book. The disquieting moments there (unlike the shocks of realism in the earlier novels) come with sentences of such precision and such careful elegance that you remember rudely that you have to do with art and not life.

Caracole seems a return to the mode of the earlier novels. Its lapidary style calls attention to the artifice and hardly encourages immersion in the fictional world White creates. (This style will always reach for "larder" when "cupboard" would do just as well.) Nevertheless, psychological realism is as important in the book as verbal stylization. At times *Caracole* reads like one of those anatomies of love the French like to write—Stendhal's *On Love* or Roland Barthes's *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*:

> Edwige felt a physical aversion to Mateo that she couldn't hide and that, once she realized he was in love, she saw no further need to conceal. He had embraced several comforting fallacies. He believed that others love us for our merits and he struggled to prove his to Edwige, whereas the truth is that merit chills ardor. He believed that anyone he loved so well must sooner or later return his devotion, whereas the chief condition for devotion is that it not be reciprocal. He believed that if he insinuated himself into her friendship he'd eventually possess her love, whereas . . . affection tranquilizes passion.

White understands people well and tells us what he knows in balanced, epigrammatic sentences. He tells us that tastemakers in a great city idolize "either the tentative beginnings of youth or the absolute mastery of maturity," but have little patience for anything in between. He knows how "fame permits someone to be terse, since his remarks are sure to be heard, and beauty allows someone to be silent, since there is no danger of a beauty being ignored," and he understands that "the very sort of canned wisdom we hoot at

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Phyllis Rose is the author of Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages *(Alfred A. Knopf) and* Writing of Women: Essays in a Renaissance *(Wesleyan University Press).*

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in a public forum we greet as profound when someone lovely whispers it to us." In observations like this and in the dramatic encounters between the six main characters, *Caracole* offers a devastating panorama of life in a high-powered city where everyone is on the make in one way or another and where the mixture of greed and vanity is evident in most of the practices of love.

The opening sections are hard going. In a highly wrought novel, they are overwrought. Gabriel at Madder Pink, his family home, is bored, discovers sex, is imprisoned by his father, who bears him a mysterious grudge, is rescued by his uncle from the city and taken away. It is all very dreamy and archetypal. But with the move to the city, the novel seems to firm up. In the "capital," ruled by "conquerors," inhabited by sophisticated but powerless "patriots," *Caracole* puts down roots in reality.

White has created two splendid characters. One is Gabriel's uncle, Mateo, who rescues the boy from his father and arranges his rehabilitation. The other is Mathilda, the intellectual queen of the capital. (The beauty queen is Edwige, an actress, with whom Mateo is abjectly in love.) Portraits of female intellectuals are sufficiently rare that Mathilda ought to enter literature's gallery of great women characters.

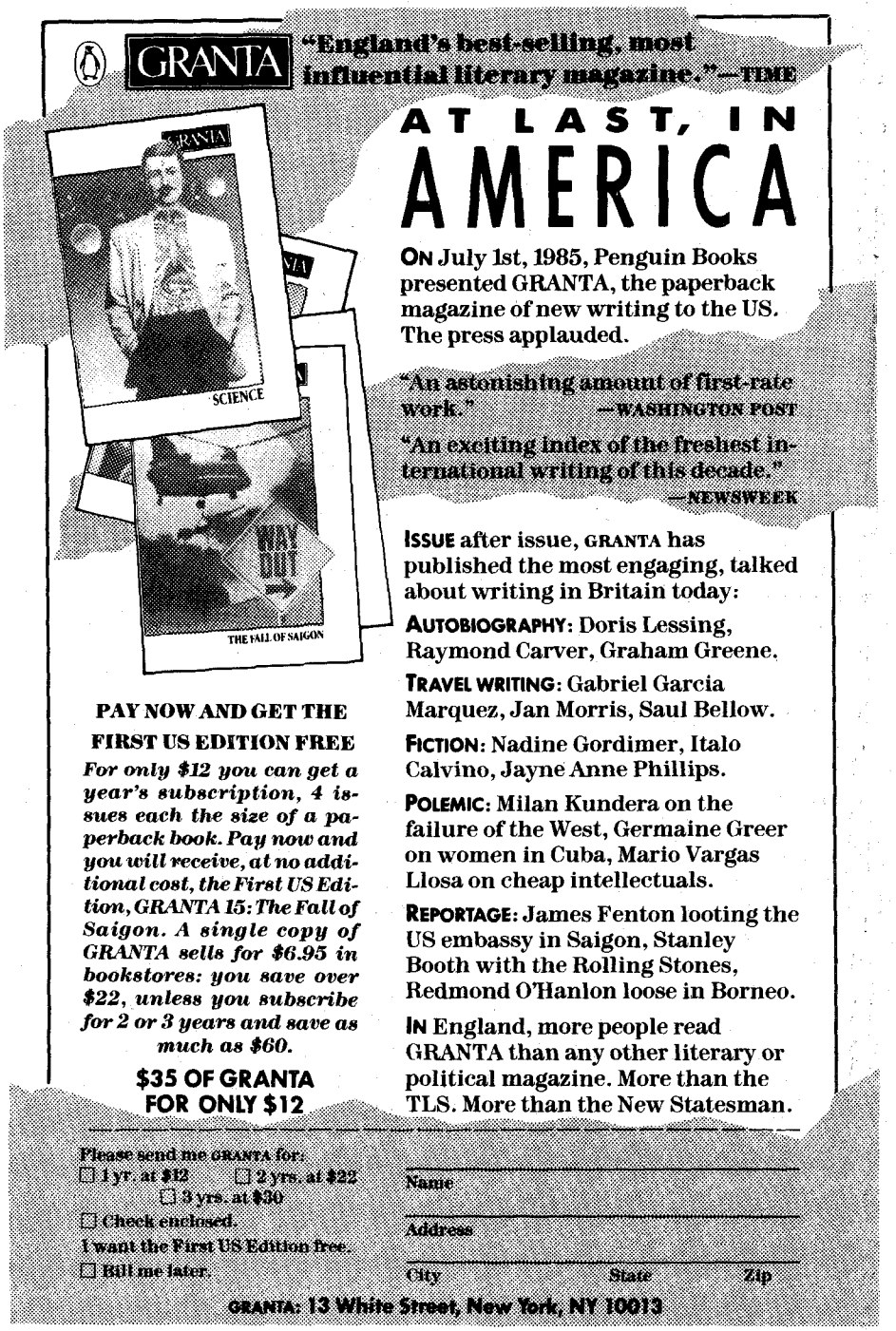
Commanding in intellect, Mathilda fears that her "self," which she would be embarrassed to associate with her body but would not associate with her mind, is unlovable. When she and Gabriel are alone in her country home on the point of becoming lovers, she says, "I must bathe," and he understands that she means, "I am unworthy," at the same time that, in another way, she considers him unworthy of her. Few writers have depicted this mixture of self-loathing and arrogance as well as White, and fewer have had the imagination to attribute such complexity to a woman. A moralist among esthetes, an esthete among moralists, Mathilda is never less than complicated. She is embarrassed by her wealth but likes beautiful objects, so she excuses them as ethnographic finds. All life is research to Mathilda. Her dandified son acts out the impulses she has forbidden herself. Too radical in thought to allow herself to respect the social conventions she in fact respects, she encourages Daniel to respect them for her. He functions partly as a companion, partly as a research assistant, going into low-life parts of town at night and bringing back prize pieces of reality to spread before her.

Mathilda loves the opera and always goes early, a habit she explains by invoking a "bourgeois anxiety" about being on time:

> To confess to "bourgeois anxiety" hinted at an appealing modesty—and concealed her real motive, which was to see and be seen. Although she presented herself as a withdrawn, morose intellectual, she had an infallible sense of theater.

Indeed, Mathilda, so much a product of her reading, has learned emotions either from novels or from even more melodramatic operas:

> The only emotions she could name, recognize and reproduce were the violent ones. As a result, she smiled ironically or with embarrassment at all her impulses toward expression, but there was no impulse that wasn't operatic in its irrationality and grandeur. When other people perceived her as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being guarded, even sour, they mistook her choking back of instinct as contempt for instinct.

Mateo, who brings Gabriel back to life, is an aging Don Juan transformed by his disinterested love for his nephew. His friends are puzzled by the trouble he takes over the boy:

> If the boy had been a girl, a pretty adolescent girl, the public response might have appeared to be the same though it would have been entirely different. People would have rushed to congratulate him on his magnanimity in order to hush amused suspicions no one dared to voice but by which everyone felt titillated.

Thoroughly urban and urbane, Mateo enjoys "the game of trading favors and coercing courtesies" and finds the trade-off of influence for intimacy at which he is so adept "worldly, fair, even (if seen in the right light) cheerful." Yet he fears his specialized career of sexual conquest has left him unable to love, has "warped his responses as surely as some cultures stretch necks, lengthen earlobes or bind feet, distortions that cannot later be undone, that leave the victim incapable of a normal life." This courtly man is powered by a core of self-loathing which he structures his day to avoid. If he sees enough people and generates enough chatter, by evening he can manage to forget his fears enough to greet a stranger. But his terror of boring others ends by making him seem silly, and to Mathilda he is "someone so hounded by an inexplicable need to make it up to everyone that he'd ended by displaying a suspect courtesy matched only by his suspect compassion."

White's portrait of a narcissist taking on the care of someone else and helping his own soul in the process is done with tender and loving realism. I insist upon the psychological realism because of the strenuous artifice of so much of the book. White's work appeals to me precisely because of its unique mixture of artifice and realism, but for the same reason he is not everyone's cup of tea. Americans do not take readily to a lapidary prose style or to self-consciousness in literature at all. Over time, John Updike has established his commitment to golf-playing suburban reality, but at the start of his career even he was attacked for preciosity. Nabokov had to make his name synonymous with sexual perversion to neutralize his reputation for contrivance. If, as is the case with Edmund White, the writer has identified himself as homosexual, the offense is compounded and the work likely to be thought effete.

White's gorgeous style, his verbal intricacies and subtleties, will seem suspect to people brought up on Hemingway. The liaisons in this book will be seen as suspiciously heterosexual, forced and unearned, simply because the author is homosexual, just as people said the bickering couple of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was really a gay couple in drag—as though there were a difference between bickering gay couples and bickering straight ones. For this reason I could have wished the presentation of the book a little less gay. I wish it didn't have the title it has, smacking of Ronald Firbank and furbelows. I wish the beautiful young man by Piero della Francesca did not grace the cover. If I read the situation correctly, Americans will be too eager to dismiss White's work as merely gorgeous anyway. □

Boom at BAM

FRANK ROSE

In the past three years the Next Wave Festival—an eclectic survey of avant-garde trends in the performing arts—has become as indispensable a part of New York City's cultural life as the Whitney Biennial. It's even managed to do this without becoming generally reviled, a remarkable achievement in light of the Whitney experience. Clearly, any commitment to showcase the best examples of new art is a dangerous proposition. But while there are obviously worthy young dancers, composers, dramatists and so forth who have not yet been blessed with the Next Wave imprimatur, the fact that any mainstream institution is willing to venture beyond the spurious vanguard of updated Shakespeare is reason to celebrate. "Festival," then, is not a bad word for what's been happening at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Before there was a festival there was a series—occasional performances by people like Philip Glass and Laurie Anderson scattered throughout the season. When these did better than expected at the box office, BAM director Harvey Lichtenstein, a longtime supporter of experimental dance and theater, proposed a consolidated schedule that would have the academy's three performance spaces operating simultaneously. A search for funding yielded enough corporate and foundation support to balance the limited amount of Federal money available, and the project was on. It quickly went from tenuous to successful to wildly fashionable. Aside from institutional contributors like A.T.&T., the Rockefeller Foundation and Manufacturers Hanover, the Next Wave fund receives money from such individuals as Bianca Jagger, Lee Radziwill, Betsey Johnson, Roy Lichtenstein, Mary Boone and professional nightclub habitué Diane Brill. The possible effects of this kind of trendiness on the avant-garde was even the subject of a predictably inconclusive essay in this year's lavish festival catalogue, which was produced with the assistance of Philip Morris.

What's happened is that BAM has found a way to package the performing arts that takes maximum advantage of the current boom in the art market. That boom is predicated on the notion of art as a commodity, as something that can be bought and sold and that will appreciate in value. The idea of art-as-commodity is what distinguishes the art world of the 1980s, which is dominated by painting, from the art world of the 1970s, which was dominated by conceptual art, performance art and other intellectual intangibles. Stuff is more consumable than nonstuff. But the avid market for stuff depends on more than its physicality; it depends as well on the glamour that has attached itself to art and artists, a glamour that collectors can share if they know what and how to buy. Those who can't afford to buy can go to galleries and museums and look. Now, thanks to the Next Wave, they can go to BAM and look too.

The idea behind the Next Wave is that people can consume an art experience as efficiently as they can consume an art product. It's a brilliant concept, and what makes it work is the strategic positioning of the Next Wave. By mixing new music, modern dance,

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contemporary theater and performance art on its calendar, the festival has established itself at the nexus of all four. By encouraging collaborations—Trisha Brown with Laurie Anderson and Robert Rauschenberg; Richard Foreman with Peter Gordon and David Salle—it has blurred distinctions and created an appetite for the star-studded spectacular. The effect is that virtually everything on the schedule becomes a form of performance art—not the kind that took place in hushed SoHo galleries a decade ago but something different, less cerebral, more accessible, more commercial.

One of the festival's strengths has been its readiness to mix people whose creative sensibilities were formed fifteen or twenty years ago—people like Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs—with voices that are very much the product of the current era. This has helped lift the avant-garde out of a vacuum and put it in a historical continuum. Another strength has been the decision to focus on one type of performance each year and build the rest of the calendar around it. Last year's festival was centered around music. It opened with a Meredith Monk/Ping Chong music theater piece called *The Games*, featured Steve Reich's orchestral work *The Desert Music*, and closed with a revival of the legendary Robert Wilson/Philip Glass opera *Einstein on the Beach*. This year the focus is on dance, and although four American choreographers are represented—Margaret Jenkins of San Francisco, Laura Dean and Nina Wiener of New York and Carolyn Carlson, who lives and works in Paris—most of the excitement is being generated by Germans. Susanne Linke, who studied under the expressionist master Mary Wigman in Berlin, will present four solo dances in December. Reinhild Hoffmann, who with Linke was once co-director of Kurt Jooss's Folkwang School in Essen and who now heads the Tanztheater Bremen, will present a dance theater piece in November. And in October, Pina Bausch, who studied under Jooss in the 1950s and danced for him in the 1960s, opened the festival with the American premiere of four spectacular dance theater productions representing a decade of work at her Tanztheater Wuppertal. Bausch, who had her U.S. debut at last year's festival, was clearly returning as the leader of the new German dance.

It was just a few years ago that neo-expressionists like Georg Baselitz and Anselm Kiefer restored emotional content to painting after years of American domination and preoccupation with form. From the three original works in her program at BAM—*Arien*, *Kontakthof* and *Auf Dem Gebirge Hat Man Ein Geschrei Gehort*—it was apparent that Bausch has done something similar in dance. Her work is suffused with *angst*, that voguish combination of alienation, anxiety and despair. It's also full of sharp observations, carefully placed barbs and spectacles that verge on the fantastic. Like a Wagner unhinged, she presents a startling series of not-quite-primal images: a woman flopping coyly amid a forest of felled evergreens, a hippo and a maiden in a shallow pool, a woman shrieking orgasmically before an audience that claps as at a recital. Violence is never far away, although as a general rule it's closest when the action is at its most restrained. A dinner party erupts into a riot. A man and a woman are chased across the stage, caught and forced to kiss. What we see are tableaux of struggle and domination that dissolve into one another in startling and unpredictable ways. Conflict is the only given.

A crucial element in Bausch's theater of social and sexual delirium is the stage. It tends to be covered with something, like water or dirt. The ankle-deep water in *Arien* seems a gimmick at first, but as the work progresses it becomes a crucial part of the proceedings, its wetness transforming every move, its shimmering reflection creating a magical presence in the hall. Ditto the hippo (two men in a suit), whose lugubrious silliness adds a touch of levity to what could have been a heavy-handed critique. For *Arien* is about social masks, just as *Kontakthof* is about sexual conflict, and Bausch's greatest strength may be her ability to comment on such matters in an insightful way. There are weaknesses—the second acts of both *Kontakthof* and *Gebirge* are a bit slow, and the dramatic conventions she employs, while inventive, become familiar after a while. Even so, she works the emotions so shamelessly that it's difficult to remain uninvolved for long.

Like Robert Wilson, whose theater this resembles superficially, Bausch presents a nonnarrative series of highly charged images. But where Wilson's

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work is mystical and fundamentally radiant, Bausch is stark, caustic and pitiless. Hers is a dark view of the human condition, one in which progress is thrown into reverse. In her world, love leads inexorably to enslavement and cruelty. Manners degenerate into chaos. Social conventions are a carefully maintained sham, a transparent cloak for our relentlessly advancing animal nature. What she gives us are dreamlike visions of social entropy, punctuated by flashes of humor and wit.

Interestingly enough, the audience for this work—as for other Next Wave presentations—seemed to consist of the same people who frequent New York's other academy of music, the one in Manhattan that Steve Rubell has transformed into the Palladium. Unlike Studio 54, which promoted a glossy, photorealist view of life, the Palladium is an expressionist phantasmagoria. With its Francesco Clemente murals, its Jean-Michel Basquiat paintings and its state-of-the-art electronic dance floor dropped into the corroded shell of a grand nineteenth-century theater, it celebrates the glamorous life of the artist in a world of ruination and decay. For three months every fall, the Next Wave Festival transforms BAM into the reverse image of the Palladium: a place where art is not on the walls but on the stage, not a backdrop for pleasure but the source of pleasure itself. That could be the real reason it's so much more successful than the Biennial: because it reminds us that art is not a commodity but an experience. □

THEATER.

PAUL BERMAN

The Iceman Cometh
The Marriage of Figaro

Alfred Kazin has said that Theodore Dreiser's famous awkwardness, his clumsy obsession with piling up details, is in fact a source of his strength. The Dreiserian method may have been inelegant, but it was always to the point. It conveyed a single powerful vision of life: the cruel, the driven, the inevitable. This observation comes to mind every time I see a play by Eugene O'Neill. O'Neill, too, is clumsy, huge, pessimistic. He, too, piles detail upon detail. And I keep hoping that the shapelessness of his heap will likewise prove to be an unexpected source of strength.

But that is not the case. Ungainliness in O'Neill is merely ungainly. It does not convey a single powerful underlying vision. Instead two or three visions drift about in that endless dialogue. Sometimes a Dreiser-like naturalism rolls across the stage. Sometimes a Beckett-like symbolism appears. Sometimes one idea chases another across a long evening of uncertain intentions. *The Iceman Cometh* begins with a symbolic universe not too remote from *Endgame*. It progresses to hard-boiled realism, then to something that seems preachy and sentimental. Finally, all preceding scenes are revealed to have been a mere fable whose point is antipreachy and antisentimental. What is one to make of such a play? Perhaps the story will prove interesting. But the story is missing a lung and a liver. The details behind young Parritt's betrayal of his mother and of the anarchist movement remain frustratingly obscure. Why Hickey shoots his long-suffering wife is never, in truth, entirely explained. These are not small difficulties, and all we can do is gape at the speeches, some of which are indeed very good, and try not to think too much about what is going on.

The vogue for O'Neill, the pumping for him that persists after all these years, principally at *The New York Times*, is preposterous. Before the new production opened, Barbara Gelb wrote in *The Times* of September 29 that *Iceman* will eventually accumulate as much scholarly commentary as *Hamlet*. That's absurd. There are, of course, things to discuss about O'Neill, like whether certain directorial approaches can salvage the salvageable. Good experiences can be cited. David Leveaux's production of *A Moon for the Misbegotten* two seasons ago evoked a world that was half symbolist, half realist, and the effect was commendable; the oddly shaped container fit the oddly shaped contents. This year's *Strange Interlude*, directed by Keith Hack, pushed the symbolist possibilities still further, until the play seemed to take place on the moon, and that was not a good effect. José Quintero's *Iceman*, on the other hand, hews to the old realist custom. Quintero's saloon looks like a saloon and the barflies like barflies; the low life looks low; the realism is strictly real. And this production, too, ends up less than successful simply because O'Neill isn't strictly anything, except long-winded.

Drama, happily, is one of those art forms, like poetry and jazz, that can often get by with an occasional brilliant moment. Quintero's *Iceman* gets by in the several moments when the barflies reveal their "pipe dreams" while simultaneously showing the dreams to be beyond hope. One watches those speeches with pleasure because one actor and then another (John Christopher Jones, Barnard Hughes, Roger Robinson and on down the line) is a man of talent, and the ensemble is at once wonderfully various and plausibly united. Donald Moffat makes an exemplary Larry Slade, burnt-out anarchist number one. (The collapse of proletarian anarchism is one of the central themes.) Hickey's monologue at the end is no small moment either. Jason Robards performs it with his customary gusto, wheezing and laughing like a church organ, turning and stretching his face so elastically that the shadows themselves proclaim his mood. Robards perfectly expresses a man who lives in a world that is partly all too real, partly a world of symbols and alcohol—the kind of man who, if O'Neill had been able to expand him further, would have made *Iceman* the masterpiece that people like to say it is. A grand performance, I thought. But a grand play? The equal of Dreiser's grandly awkward novels? A play that will be discussed the way *Hamlet* is discussed?

Andrei Serban has directed Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro* at Circle in the Square with such precision and so many roller skates that the production resembles an overwound clock in which every actor is a gear or a spring. The ticking can drive you crazy. I kept thinking an actor would drop a line and the entire gizmo would go sky-high. Sure enough, a performer did drop something the night I was there. It was the tape machine, which refused to supply music for the wedding ball, and all was lost. Not one of those overdirected actors stepped forward to improvise dialogue while the machine was being fixed. Not one of the singers in the production offered to repeat a song from elsewhere in the play, not one of the three live musicians stepped up to ad-lib. Instead the cast went into confusion, then undertook to dance and roller-skate their ballroom scene to the sounds of silence, quite as if nothing

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was wrong. The evening that produced this embarrassing moment was singularly unjoyful. But Christopher Reeve did distinguish himself as the count. The actor who made his reputation playing Superman in the movies proved a master at spoofing macho on the stage. He was a veritable Cary Grant, dapper, droll, handsome.

Readers who enjoy serious political discussion should go see David Hare's *A Map of the World* at the Public Theater before it is too late. *A Map of the World* is that rare thing, a political play of genuine intelligence, and while it lacks several virtues, the virtues it has are striking. Review to come. □

FILMS.

ANDREW KOPKIND

Sweet Dreams

Country music is the great popular expression of rural white America and perhaps the last authentic music of any American community or class with an identifiable sense of place (pause for incoming fire . . .). A lot of people don't like the music, the musicians, the culture, the class or the place, which is understandable, but they are hard put to offer a convincing candidate of their own. Partisans of rap, car & surf or devo/punk will easily assert that those forms express the essence of Harlem, Huntington Beach and Akron, respectively. Geraldo Rivera once claimed on ABC's *20/20* that Hall and Oates made "the music of the urban streets," and the many friends of John Cougar Mellencamp believe he gives good voice to the gestalt of Indiana. I would agree, and add that Pat Benatar sings to the singles bar community the way Bessie Smith sang to the speak-easies. But a bar is not a place, and individual performers do not reflect an entire culture, even if they sing like Hank Williams or Billie Holliday. And faddish forms are necessarily too narrow in their history and restricted in compass to represent a whole region.

Country music is big, broad, old and complex, with as many sources and contradictions as the blues, which it resembles in sense and sensibility. For some time now, the sources of country have been drying up and the contradic-

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June Jordan has published many books of poetry and an earlier collection of essays, *Civil Wars*. Her writing is widely read in such publications as *Essence*, *The Village Voice*, *Sojourner*, *Savvy*, and the *Boston Globe*.

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tions taking over. Sales of country records are slow and audiences are shrinking. The best performers still belt out the ballads with conviction, but the worst have acquired the passionate intensity demanded by TV producers and the urban throng, and we all know how things fall apart in that stage of the game. Country music is in decline because the country place—the culture of the white heartlands—is disappearing amid the malls, the media and the monotony of an imperial metropolis. Kids in Kentucky today find their fantasies in Mötley Crüe more readily than in the Grand Ole Opry, and Nashville feeds its own destruction by forcing its acts into metropolitan styles. They call it "crossover," but it sounds like selling out.

If Patsy Cline came up against Barbara Mandrell for a TV contract this year, there's no doubt who would ink pact with web. Cline was *really* country when country wasn't cool. She was dumpy, frowzy, chubby and down-to-earth in a housewifely or waitressy way. Her mother made her clothes and costumes, which would fit somewhere between the top line of Kresge's and the bottom of Penney's, circa 1953. No country woman ever sang like Patsy Cline did, and no one ever will. Her manager, Randy Hughes, played by David Clennon in *Sweet Dreams*, tells Cline (Jessica Lange) when they meet that her ballad singing makes his "hair stand up on the back of my neck." For once that cliché can be clinically confirmed and the effect replicated even thirty years after the fact through the miracle of electronic reproduction. Cline had a voice that was at once sweet, sad, distant and immediate, which is to say ineffable but true. Unlike Mandrell, who is all makeup, or Dolly Parton, who is mostly T & A, Cline was all voice.

Lange lip-syncs Cline to admirable effect in *Sweet Dreams*, and her portrayal is energetic, intelligent and even. As in *Frances* and *Country*, Lange is thoroughly committed to her role, and her tough enthusiasm ennobles what could have been just another bio pic. Still, she is not the best thing in the movie. Ed Harris, as Charlie Dick ("*Dick*?" Patsy giggles when he introduces himself at a honky-tonk), the rascally love of her life, gives an absolutely seamless performance, which is just as energetic and every bit as committed as Lange's but somehow closer to the truth, as far as it can be inferred

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from the script (by Robert Getchell, of *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*). Among Harris's many advantages as an actor is that he is naturally retro all the time, whether he's playing John Glenn in *The Right Stuff*, the mercenary in *Under Fire* or the sailor in *Swing Shift*. Lange, on the other hand, has the *Geist* of a different *Zeit*, much more modern in mood and attitude. Harris looks like he walked out of an early Bruce Weber photograph or a *Life* spread on soldiers coming home from the Korean War. Lange is all *Interview*.

It's too bad that their elegant performances, not to mention the hair-raising Cline soundtrack, can't do more to move *Sweet Dreams* beyond biography into a picture of country life and times. Director Karel Reisz chose to isolate his characters, not only from their place but even from the springs of their own behavior. Surely the Patsy Cline story is more than a rural romance. In the film, there are far too many fights, reconciliations, glory days and lonely nights, and too little in the way of context, both internal and external. Lange's Cline doesn't struggle for stardom, it simply arrives at opportune moments. The world outside her relationship with Charlie hardly exists at all, except for the barest necessities of time-fixation and locale-setting. Perhaps the filmmakers thought the context was already supplied by *Coal Miner's Daughter*, in which Michael Apted opened up Loretta Lynn's story to demonstrate the effects of class, commerce and struggle on a country singer's life. Reisz zooms where Apted pans, always opting for the emotional close-up and the political two-shot instead of the wide-angle sweep.

It's good but not, finally, good enough. Without a map of the country, the trip through Cline's abbreviated career is literally pointless. The predictable moments of crisis and exhilaration don't amount to a life, just a story. In other words, there's more to biography than chronology. It is a mark of the director's technical skill as well as his shortened vision that we are unprepared for the final and only tragedy of Patsy Cline's life. Two hours of singing and boozing, of cheating hearts and walking the line, and then Patsy is at the pay phone in an airport calling home. The audience gasped, and someone called out from the darkness in the back of the theater: "Don't fly, Patsy. Take the bus!" □

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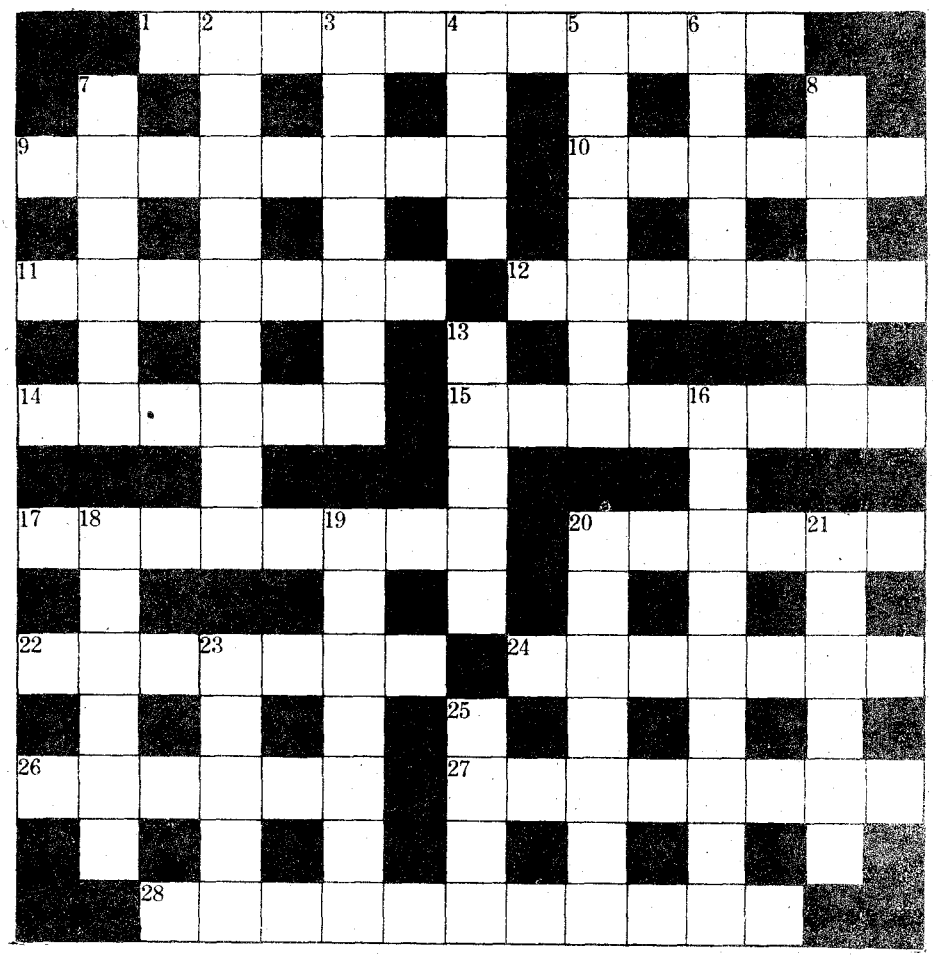

ACROSS

1 It might fly over Nautilus and still be less than perfect. (11)
9 One way to avoid duty makes mother hang around. (8)
10 One might crow about the way to keep Scottish heads bare. (6)
11 See 27
12 Merriment would not be real, exactly, at one. (7)
14 Look in the present form before the past goes up and down. (6)
15 Hid in the beaten-up piano, like St. Patrick's foes. (8)
17 In the vegetable line, everything needs change for coins around it. (8)
20 Stop acting like a model, and insist on a different ruler! (6)
22 With one drink, it takes a wizard to make a hasty but energetic search. (7)
24 He was barely discernible as the well-dressed monarch. (7)
26 Study art the wrong way, and you're bound to find a fighter against the good or the bad, depending on your politics. (6)
27 and 11 Sandburg's not so good with the deep hollows, but parks here. (8,7)
28 One closely resembles a bead on an abacus, for example. (11)

DOWN

2 and 13 Catholic hangout? It's responsible for a certain movement. (9,5)
3 This place isn't likely to be found again, since it's between two points. (7)
4 A clichéd type of smile goes amiss, evidently! (4)
5 One who comes out hears a pained expression to come out into the open. (7)
6 The extent of anger, perhaps. (5)
7 Is father dead when it comes to taste . . . (6)
8 . . . to criticize a mother's hat? (6)
13 See 2
16 If you stick out your tongue, this is what you might get for it! (9)
18 Is it a master stroke on what might be clipped by some? (6)
19 It might be coming down in buckets, head to tail—to fix the nature of this! (7)
20 A bad girl and I might get caught by little members of two parties. (7)
21 Somewhat like 23, in part this log and . . . (6)
23 . . . a foreign word to serve as a maxim. (5)
25 Proving each variety might give you a pain. (4)

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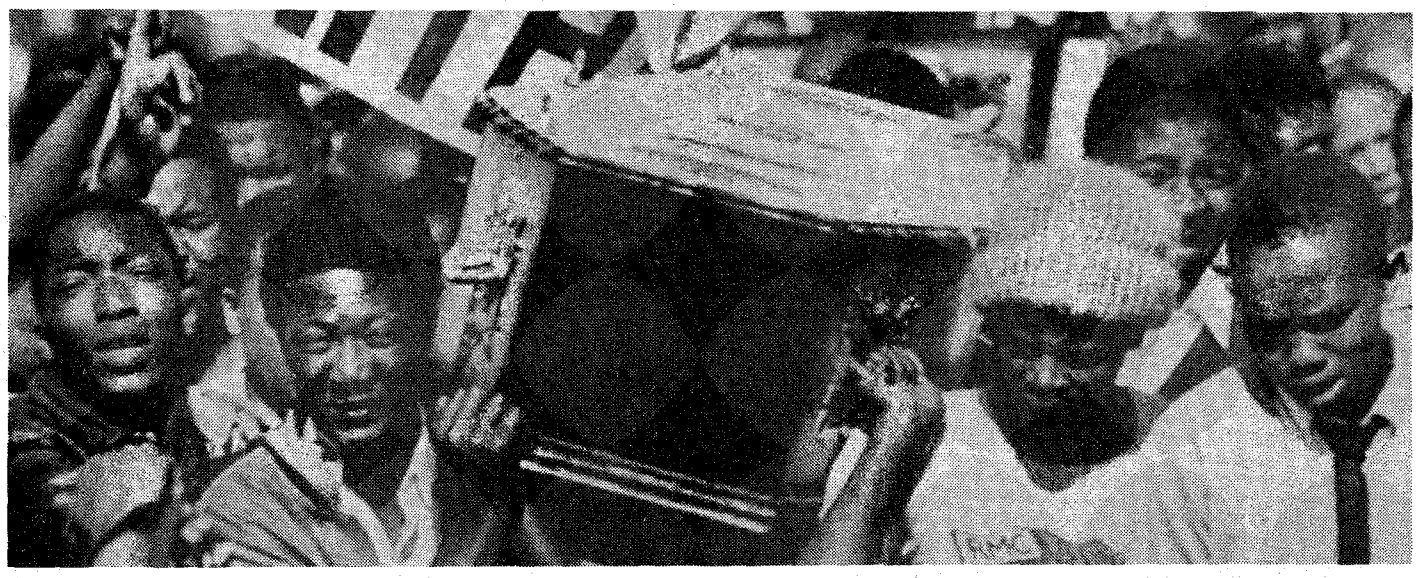

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